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In Quest of the Unbeliever and the Ignoramus

Ryeko pe pa ngat acel[1]
(Wisdom, cunningness, skill or knowledge
is not for one person only)

… and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.
(**Acts** 1[8], King James Version)

Defining power

At the start of the 1980s, I was involved in a co-operative project between the Faculty of Theology of Utrecht University and the Department of Religious Studies, Philosophy, and Classics of the University of Zimbabwe. It was the result of a 'voyage of discovery' to Southern Africa by the newly-appointed Missiology professor at the Utrecht Faculty. The project was funded by the Dutch government from development funds, and was also sponsored by Utrecht University. It aimed at capacity building in the field of research in 'African Traditional Religions' at the University of Zimbabwe and at assisting in the development of teaching materials in this subject for secondary schools throughout Zimbabwe.[2]

The project embodied, in a nutshell, the problem areas on which I focus in this thesis. They are those of a Western university co-operating in a spirit of partnership with a counterpart institution in the Southern hemisphere in an area which clearly belonged to a cultural and religious tradition specific to Africa, but which, at the same time, had been researched by scholars from Northern hemisphere universities, and thus to a certain extent 'confiscated' and appropriated by them.

Paradoxically, the Northern colleagues were supposed to assist their Southern counterparts in researching, and thereby defining, a central feature of the cultural setting of the Southern partners, namely their native religious systems. In the discussions on the progress of the project, one central subject remained implicit and in the background: i.e. who defined what, how and for whom? The subject of the 'power of defining' (also in its institutionalised form) in religion and academia in Africa, is the thread that runs through all the articles that follow.

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[1] From: Okot p'Bitek, *Acholi Proverbs*, Nairobi: Heineman Kenya, 1985.
[2] See for more detailed information on this project: Ter Haar and Van Rinsum 1994, and Ter Haar, Moyo and Nondo 1992.

(Western) science

In the case of the link-up between Utrecht University and the University of Zimbabwe, the defining power seemed to originate largely from a university in the North nurtured, and embodied in a Western concept of science. When I say 'a Western concept', I actually challenge a universal concept of what science is. In what way can this Western concept be characterised? Bill Clinton, the President of the United States of America, unwittingly gave a paradigmatic answer to this question during a press conference on the occasion of the completion of the first survey of the human genome project on June 26, 2000, with these words:

> Today's announcement represents more than just an epic-making triumph of science and reason [….] Today, we are learning the *language in which God created life* [the italics are mine]. We are gaining ever more awe for the complexity, the beauty, the wonder of God's most divine and sacred gift. [….] Science is a voyage of exploration into the unknown. […] What more powerful form of study of mankind could there be than *to read our own instruction book* [italics are mine]?[3]

Seen from this perspective, Western science is determined and destined to make humankind and its environment *legible*.[4] Science aims at reading the 'Book of Nature'. From this viewpoint, science and its practitioners are not restricted to solely 'reading' their own environment. All along the road to other parts of the world, Western civilisation appeared to be all too willing to 'read' the 'Other' but also to 'read out' to the 'Other' and to *pre-scribe* to those they encountered on this long journey. Here is what the Belgian missionary, Father Placide Tempels, said about his own 'reading-the-Bantu-project':

> We do not claim, of course that the Bantu are capable of formulating a philosophical treatise, complete with an adequate vocabulary. It is our job to proceed to such systematic development. It is we who will be able to tell them, in precise terms, what their inmost concept of being is. They will recognize themselves in our words and will acquiesce, saying, "You understand us: you know us completely: you "know" in the way we "know".[5]

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[3] White House Press Release, Office of the Press Secretary, June 26, 2000 (downloaded text from internet).

[4] I will come back to this idea of 'legibility' below. It is a prominent topic in James Scott's fascinating study of 1998.

[5] Tempels 1959: 25. The Dutch original text reads: 'Het is heelemaal niet zeker dat de Bantu-zelf ons een volledige filosofische terminologie aan de hand zullen doen. De proeve van systematisch uitgewerkte Bantu-ontologie moet ons werk zijn. En wanneer zij er eenmaal is, zullen wij de

This statement by Tempels, whose *Bantu Philosophy* has had a tremendous influence on the thinking in and about Africa, expresses in a very concise manner the theme of this study: i.e. ‘They will recognize themselves in our words’. Our words define the ‘Other’ who are given their ‘true’ identity – of which they were not yet fully aware of - ‘revealed’ and ‘prescribed’. The purpose of this part of the study is to give an introduction to four articles that in one way or another relate to the theme of how the identity of the ‘Other’ has been prescribed within the domain of religion and academia in Africa.

Introduction to the articles

In the first article *Knowing the African; Edwin W. Smith and the Invention of African Traditional Religion,* my purpose is to demonstrate that the study of African religions by many missionaries, anthropologists and scholars of religion, was couched in a discourse ‘African Traditional Religion’. This discourse was part of a broader colonial discourse that aimed to master the ‘Other’ through a process of knowing the ‘Other’. In trying to outline this discourse, I make use of Edward Said’s concept of *Orientalism.*

The concept of ‘African Traditional Religion’ emanated from 19th century liberal theological thinking in Europe, which went on to influence early 20th century missionaries, such as Edwin W. Smith, in particular. These men translated the religious activities they witnessed in Africa into their own theological idiom, thereby designing a pyramid model of ‘African Traditional Religion’ with God at the apex, humans at the base, and the spirit world as intermediary between God and man. This discourse, I will argue, was to some extent also adopted by African theologians and scholars of religion who apparently ‘recognised’ themselves in this model of religion. In this sense, ‘African Traditional Religion’ became part of the identity not only of religious individuals but also of larger groups in society.

In the second article, *Edwin W. Smith and his ‘Raw Material’: Texts of a Missionary and Ethnographer in Context,* I focus on the ethnographic writings of one of those early missionaries, Edwin W. Smith. He left Britain in the heyday of colonialism in order to share his religious beliefs with the Ila-people in former Northern Rhodesia, now Zambia. One of his projects was to get to ‘Know the African’ and to collect ‘raw material’ on this bizarre ‘Other’ for the metropolitan armchair anthropologists of Europe. This division of labour was an instance, avant

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Bantu kunnen zeggen, en klaar zeggen, wat zij in hun diepste wezen denken over de wezens. Zij zullen zichzelf in onze woorden erkennen en antwoorden: Gij hebt ons verstaan, gij kent ons volkomen, gij << weet >> gelijk wij << weten >>’. (Tempels 1946: 14)

la lettre, of what became known later as the ‘centre – periphery’ model at a time when Europe was extracting raw material, and thus, economic wealth, from parts of the world it had colonised, for processing at home. The processing of raw materials, however, applied not only to natural products, but also to cultural constituents of the civilisations of other people which were likewise processed into theories about the ‘Other’, in the domain of ‘African Traditional Religion’ for instance. These theories were later returned to the ‘Other(s)’ who ‘recognised themselves’ in those European words.

In my third article, *Honest to Jok: Okot p’Bitek and De-Hellenising God*, we encounter the Ugandan poet, soccer-player, academic and critic, Okot p’Bitek (1931-1982). Okot criticised in a furious, but elegant style precisely this process of ‘recognising yourself’ in other’s words through subtle mechanisms of power. He defended in his writings the traditions of Africa, embodied in Lawino, the eloquent African woman in his *Song of Lawino*[6], who was proud of her own traditions and who stood against her Westernised husband Ochol. Okot p’Bitek was especially outraged about the way Western missionaries, anthropologists and scholars of religion had distorted the concept of religion in Africa. Much to his regret, even African theologians and scholars, such as John S. Mbiti, followed suit in this Western distortion of the religions of his African compatriots. But, as I will show, even Okot could not entirely escape this Western moulding and in a way he too joined a Westernising way of thinking about African religions.

These three articles have in common that individuals feature prominently in them. In this respect, I followed Edward Said in his explicit dissent from Foucault’s depersonalised discourse, because these individuals too exerted their own power of defining, although they were themselves subject to their own religious and cultural backgrounds. They were also, each in their own particular way, subjected to the ‘Power of defining’ within the domain of religion in Africa.

From Religion to Academia

I planned initially, to add an extra article on the historiography of the study of African Religion and the development of African theological thinking as it grew in interaction with, and in opposition to, Western theology and Western religion right up to the present day. That article would have allowed me to neatly wrap up this thesis while remaining within the domain of ‘Religions in Africa’.

However, at that point, it was Okot p’Bitek and a growing need for reflection on my own daily practice in ‘university development co-operation’ at Utrecht

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[6] I used the 1984 edition of *Song of Lawino & Song of Ochol* published in the African Writers Series by Heinemann Publishers.

University, that pulled me into a related area in which I perceived the operation of similar mechanisms related to 'power of defining', i.e. in the domain of 'academia in Africa'. In his own idiosyncratic style, Okot pointed to the hegemonic process by which Western academics ***pre***scribe, and thereby distort, the identity of academics and their institutions in Africa, as crystallized in the domain of knowledge, and leading to a double-edged alienation. I wanted to know whether the power of defining the *unbeliever* found its counterpart in the power of defining the *ignoramus*.

In the second part of this study, therefore, I shift from religion to academia and concentrate on the establishment of universities in Africa, as an example of what Scott (1998) labelled as 'utopian social engineering programmes', originating from a 'high-modernist' faith.

But there is another connection between those two domains. In the first part of my essay *Wipe the Blackboard Clean…!: Academisation and Christianisation; Siblings in Africa?*, I emphasise some of the assumptions underlying the paradigm of Western science which originated from a specific local knowledge system and manifested itself as a Western secular theology with an inner urge to proselyte. This model inspired the colonial powers to 'convert' the *ignoramus* and to introduce a system of formal education in Africa with universities at its apex. To some extent, this is still the model that is implicitly at work in the area of inter-university development co-operation today.

The four parts of this study, therefore, all deal with the quest of the 'Western world' for the *unbeliever* and *ignoramus*. These siblings had one thing in common. They were alleged to lack knowledge or, to be more specific, they lacked the particular kinds of knowledge which grounded the siblings, religion and academia, in the West.

Knowledge and identity

A society may accommodate many configurations of production and diffusion of knowledge. Knowledge is an indispensable instrument for any member of a group or a collective, such as a family or a state, for localising its particular position in relation to others. In this way the individual or group can identify a sense of direction in a certain societal constellation by which life can be made bearable, and to a certain degree controllable and manageable. This process of localising results in the construction of the identity of an individual, a group, a society, etc. Localising one's own position with respect to other persons, groups or societies implies a disjuncture of 'Self' in relation to the 'Other'.

As Charles Taylor points out, the identity of the individual as also of larger social formations, is partly structured by 'recognition'. However, in addition to 'recognition' there is also 'misrecognition', by which the development of identity is endangered and by which people internalise a prescribed but distorted image of themselves, often resulting in 'self-depreciation'.[7] In other words, localising of identity, seen as an active process of a person or group, synchronises with 'being localised' and is seen as a process by which the identity of a person or group is prescribed and imposed by means of subtle mechanisms of power. In this way, identity is allocated.[8]

These processes of locating and allocating constantly interact and generate a dynamic of formation of identity (or 'identification'), which is completely different from the essentialist and a-historic concept of identity that presupposes a 'stable core of the self, unfolding from beginning to end through all the vicissitudes of history without change' (Hall 1996:3). People are continuously constructing their identities within a context of multiple cultural orientations.[9] The nature of the changing configurations and the related processes of acquiring knowledge, are closely connected to the positions of power that people or groups hold at a certain point in time. A society is not a 'rainbow-nation' with neatly-ordered grades of colours representing different cultures, but, referring to the works of Bourdieu, an arena in which different forms of capital - social, economic and cultural - determine power, which, in turn, determine the access to this capital.[10]

An important element of the cultural capital of people is thought to be their specific religious system which is moulded in what we usually label as religions and religious institutions. In all the cases which I define as 'a religion', the existence of an invisible world is postulated, with which people believe they can communicate, but which can neither be verified nor falsified empirically.[11] It is also believed that this invisible world can profoundly influence people's thinking and acting processes, and that it constitutes a major source of knowledge.

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[7] See Charles Taylor 1994, *passim*.

[8] Moreiras (1999) refers to a manuscript by Walter Mignolo, entitled 'The Allocation and Relocation of Identities'.

[9] I refer to the inaugural address given by Van Binsbergen, in which he problematises the concept of 'culture' and proposes to speak about 'cultural orientations'(Van Binsbergen 1999).

[10] The use of the term 'Rainbow-nation', conceals the far-reaching consequences of power-relations and continuing societal and cultural apartheid structures in South Africa.

[11] See, for instance, the definition of religion presented by J. van Baal and W.E.A. van Beek: 'Therefore we define religion or the religious as: *all explicit and implicit notions and ideas, accepted as true, which relate to a reality which cannot be verified empirically'* (J. van Baal & W.E.A. van Beek 1985: 3).

In 1967 already, Robin Horton, in his famous article *African Traditional Thought and Western Science*[12], drew attention to the analogy between an African traditional religious system and modern Western science, because both, he argued, are based on the concepts of explanation, prediction, and control. Horton was referring to knowledge systems originating in totally different cultural settings. He took as the theoretical starting point of his 'cognitive foundationalism', the assumption that there is a common rationality available to all human societies, which enables people to master their own environment cognitively. The particular guise in which this universal rationality is manifested in different systems of knowledge, is dependent on the specific social, cultural and political contexts in which this rationality developed. This explains why 'modern' science manifested itself in the West as it did and not in other parts of the world. Horton said: 'that what has led to the high cognitive yields of modern Western science is nothing more than *the universal rationality* operating in a particular technological, economic and social setting' (Horton 1993: 343). He postulated a dichotomy between Western science, being 'open' *versus* traditional African religious thinking being 'closed', and which he has later reformulated as 'adversarial' versus 'accommodative'.[13] I will come back to this 'adversarial' notion in my article on 'academia' in Africa.

Techne versus *Episteme*

This 'Hortonian' universal rationality is knowledge which enables us to control and utilise nature. I define this type of knowledge as technology, know-how, a knowledge of means. As a perpetuation of this ancient and universal *techne*, modern technology has reached a high degree of perfection in Western societies.

In a dichotomy of two ideal types of knowledge systems, Marglin (1990) contrasts *techne* with *episteme*.[14] He lists the following characteristics for both types. *Episteme* is based on ratio and logical deductions. It is analytic, articulate, universal and cerebral. It is also theoretical and impersonal. Internally, it is egalitarian but externally hierarchical, exclusive. *Techne*, on the other hand, is based on intuition and authority. It is also implicit and contextual, tactile or emotional, as well as practical and personal. Internally, it is hierarchically ordered as in a master-apprentice relationship, but externally pluralistic and inclusive.

Scott follows Marglin in his characterisation of these two types of knowledge systems. In the context of Greek philosophical thinking, however, Scott prefers to

[12] Published in *Africa* 37, 50-71, 155-187. These articles were included in Horton 1993.

[13] See, for instance, V.Y. Mudimbe and Kwame Anthony Appiah 1993. See also *Old Gods, New Worlds* in Appiah 1992: 107-136, especially 127.

[14] See especially Marglin 1990: 231-243.

use a different terminology, taking *episteme* and *techne* together versus *metis*; *metis* more or less equivalent to *techne* as defined by Marglin.[15] Although Marglin's distinction is between what he calls 'ideal types' and although the borders between those two types have blurred, this 'does not prevent a universalizing episteme from pushing its claim to a monopoly of knowledge' (Marglin 1990: 240); *episteme* being conceived here as the pinnacle of various hierarchically ordered knowledge systems.

According to Marglin, *episteme* comes close to what many understand as modern science, whereas it is more difficult to translate *techne* adequately, it sometimes being translated as 'local knowledge' or 'indigenous knowledge'. Scott, however, rejects this translation because it bears a connotation of *metis*, being a static, traditional or even outdated kind of knowledge. Scott stresses the importance of acquiring *metis* through experience and practice.[16] In this sense, *metis* or *techne*, is inclusive whereas *episteme* always calls for further articulation and tends to 'exclude elements that could not be quantified and measured but could only be judged' (Scott 19989: 322). *Episteme* wants to exclude uncertainty. Like Marglin, Scott also talks about the 'universalist pretensions of epistemic knowledge' (Scott 1998: 340).

Ethnographic knowledge

Within the realm of *episteme*, as defined by Marglin and Scott, I locate a type of knowledge which has had far-reaching consequences in the past and indeed still asserts its influence. It is the kind of ethnographic knowledge by which we define ourselves in disjunction to the 'Other', paradoxically by defining the 'Other' from our own position.[17] We produce knowledge **about** the 'Other' (with the 'Other' as *object*), **from** the 'Other' (with the 'Other' as *resource*) and, eventually, **for** the 'Other'. The word 'for' here is ambiguous. It may suggest the meaning of an altruistic meaning, in the sense of 'for the benefit of'. In this way, the 'Other' will count his blessings which originate from our, i.e. dominant, knowledge. 'For', however, may also have a *prescriptive* sense; we *pre-scribe* an identity for the 'Other'. This ambiguous meaning is also embedded in the quote from Tempels' writings. We localise ourselves by means of description and its mirror-image, prescription.

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[15] See Scott 1998: ftn. 17, p. 425.

[16] See especially Scott 1998: 309-341.

[17] See e.g. Mudimbe 1988: 'The African has become not only the Other who is everyone else except me, but rather the key which, in its abnormal differences, specifies the identity of the Same' (Mudimbe 1988: 12). See also his *The Idea of Africa* in which he speaks about 'Africa as a paradigm of difference' (Mudimbe 1994: xii).

This process of the production and diffusion of this type of knowledge takes place in a determining context of different cultural orientations which are connected to each other in a constellation of power relations. In my articles below, I illustrate how representatives of a specific, western-missionary, cultural orientation with its inherent drive for expansion, left Europe in quest of the *unbeliever* and the *ignoramus* in Africa. Even though the Africa of missionaries like Edwin W. Smith and Junod, was what it had always been - a multifarious collection of dynamic societies – there is no doubt that during their life-times the continent was on the brink of a process of rejection, assimilation and incorporation of externally incoming cultural orientations on a scale probably unique in the entire history of the continent.

The missionary Edwin W. Smith followed his vocation and left Britain for 'his tribe' called the 'Mashukulumbwe' of which he knew nothing more than that they were 'other', i.e. 'savage'. And, given his own framework of reference, he could only have concluded from that information that 'other' meant *un*-believing and *un*-knowing. His religious background, rooted in 19th century liberal theology, had nurtured this calling in him and in other missionaries like him. He left Britain in order to learn about, and from the 'Other'. His objective, however, was to know the 'Other' in order to bring them into his own range of vision, and thereby to determine, and thus to dominate the unknown 'Other'. In this study, I follow Smith on his 'voyage of discovery' to the Ila in Northern Rhodesia, a journey which enabled him to 'measure', describe, and record in texts the meaning system of the 'Other' and thereby to articulate his own, culture-specific, meaning system.

However, I demonstrate at the same time that this construction of identity of the 'religious other' does not run linea recta from a 'dominant' missionary to a 'subaltern' heathen. Smith's own identity as a missionary and an ethnographer was also affected and relocated by his prolonged stay among the Ila. In *Edwin W. Smith and his Raw Material*, I attempt to show that Smith's perception of the 'heathen-Other' changed in the course of his missionary work to a 'religious-Other'. The missionary, it seems, also came to recognize himself in the words of the heathen! Identity was being negotiated between two parties. As such, this article criticises the notion of ethnographic knowledge as a dispassionate observer's 'true representation'. Ethnographic knowledge, conceptualised as knowledge from and about the 'Other', is acquired and processed in dialogical dynamics. Clifford speaks about the 'experiential, interpretive, dialogical, and polyphonic processes' by which ethnographic knowledge is constituted (Clifford 1988:54). These processes eventually solidify and still into texts.

‘Meten is Weten’ (‘measuring is knowing’)

In undertaking this articulation, Smith was part of a greater whole, a colonial system that aimed to dominate the ‘Other’ in every aspect, and to bring the ‘Other’ within its own domain of knowledge. The ‘Other’ was divided from the 'Self'. The ‘other’ was treated as an object which could be measured, described etc. Scott points to the inner drive of modernity in rendering nature and society ‘legible’. Harding writes:

> For Europeans, knowledge-seeking is a process of first separating the observer (the self) from what is to be known, and then categorizing and measuring it in an impartial, disinterested, dispassionate manner. (Harding 1998: 364)

A Dutch expression reads very aptly in this respect, i.e. ‘meten is weten’ (‘measuring is knowing’). The genesis of anthropology as a science of ‘measuring and categorising’ the strange and bizarre ‘Other’ is in this respect, closely connected to the history of the colonial system. As such, anthropology may be seen to have been the backbone of a ‘colonial science’.[18]

The nucleus of in this type of thought which is oriented towards dominating the ‘Other’, is a message of salvation (be it secular or religious): ‘you should become like we are’. This message is the quintessence of the concept of ‘development’. The norm of the dominant ‘Self’ is elevated to the universal norm to which the other should aspire ultimately, for his own good. Our local religious system appears to be the universal (nowadays we might call it ‘global’) system for which ‘African Traditional Religion’ (as defined and *pre*-scribed for the ‘Other’) forms an adequate preparation, a true *praeparatio evangelica*.

Praeparatio evangelica

This concept of *praeparatio evangelica* was formulated by the 4th century church historian Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea (c.263-339?). In addition to his famous church history, he also wrote *Praeparatio Evangelica* en *Demonstratio Evangelica*. The *praeparatio evangelica* is the concept by which Judaism was defined as a preparation for Christianity, to be followed by the *demonstratio evangelica* as embodied by Christ and His disciples. The concept has been used in modern missiological literature to refer to activities carried out within the framework of the Christian mission, comprising also activities as education and

[18] Mudimbe uses the revealing image of a ‘colonial library’. ‘It represents a body of knowledge constructed with the explicit purpose of faithfully translating and deciphering the African object. Indeed, it fulfilled a political project in which, supposedly, the object unveils its being, its secrets, and its potential to a master who could, finally, domesticate it’ (Mudimbe 1994: xii).

medical care, which together would ultimately support the implantation of the Gospel. The African theologian John S. Mbiti, used this concept to relate African traditional religion to the true and unique person of Jesus Christ:

> I consider traditional religions, Islam, and the other religious systems to be preparatory and even essential ground in the search for the Ultimate. But only Christianity has the terrible responsibility of pointing the way to that ultimate Identity, Foundation and Source of security. (Mbiti 1969: 277) [19]

I take the concept of *Praeparatio* in this study as indicating the process of reduction in the Eusebian connotation. This notion of *Praeparatio* is crucial, because it defines the programme of development and, through that, the process of the development of the identity of the 'Other'. The concept *praeparatio* comprises both the genesis and its future completion (*demonstratio*) in a linear development, ending in 'fulfilment'. The 'Other' is localised at any time and place on this line towards the future but is, by definition, always behind us and in need of catching up with us.

The 'development' of the 'Other', the *unbeliever* and the *ignoramus*, is emphasised in this context. Metaphorically speaking, development is equated with the process of 'unfolding or growing naturally to the fulfilment of a potentiality' (Hobart 1993). In the process of development, local religious systems, and local systems of knowledge, are reduced to a location on the road to fulfilment, which is the establishment of the hegemony of (the Christian) religion and its secular counterpart, the system of knowledge that culminates in the scientific knowledge of the dominant West. The use of the Eurocentric concept of 'development', therefore, is an essential strategic tool in the process of hegemonising. David Gow, reviewing Escobar's *Encountering Development*, emphasises the 'ethnocentricity of the whole development paradigm: 'discipline the natives, control their aspirations, redefine their priorities and realities' (Gow 1996: 3).

Praeparatio universalis

In the first part of, *Wipe the blackboard clean…!*, I set out to demonstrate that a Western religious system generated, on a parallel track, a secular gospel, i.e. that

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[19] The Ghanaian theologian Bediako (1993 and 1994), speaks approvingly of Mbiti's attempt to use the notion of *Praeparatio Evangelica* as a bridge between a pre-Christian heritage and his commitment to Christianity. Mbiti thereby formulated the programme of African theology that rested on two pillars, that of African traditional religion, and the African experience and translation of the Christian Gospel. In this way Mbiti fused the notions of *Praeparatio* and *Demonstratio*.

of the theoretical knowledge by which we try to decode the details of God's revelation in nature. Our own specific, historically contingent, modality of knowledge production and knowledge transfer, as institutionalised in the system of Western formal education and as such part of a specific cultural configuration, is elevated to the universal norm, to which the 'Other' is cordially invited, but which the 'Other' is compelled to follow, on penalty of marginalisation.

In this 'totalising' process, the concept of a *praeparatio epistemica* as a sibling of the *praeparatio evangelica*, is the determining element. Local knowledge systems are reduced to the concept of 'true' knowledge and the only legitimate way to this knowledge, and are consequently marginalised. The modern, Western university, seen as the institutionalisation of, reputedly, the production of ultimate, theoretical, transcendent knowledge, is elevated to 'universitas'. However, this universitas is, at the same time, itself the product of a specific cultural constellation and a specific moment in the development of Western society.

Throughout the articles the relationship, sometimes hidden, sometimes open, but mostly ambiguous, between *praeparatio evangelica* and *praeparatio epistemica* merging in what we may define as a the *praeparatio universalis*, is actually the connecting element. Latouche formulates this point in his *The Westernization of the World* as follows:

> The white man's system was perceived as a whole: the scientific world-view, technical ingenuity and religious ritual were all part of it (Latouche 1996: 19).

In *'Wipe the Blackboard clean….!',* I try to interpret the transition from the *praeparatio evangelica* to the *praeparatio epistemica*. The relation between these two domains is not just a temporal one. It is primarily by means of their intrinsic, conceptual coherence that the two merge into the concept of the *praeparatio universalis*.

The 'missionary project' as *praeparatio evangelica* started earlier than the attempts to establish a Western education system as a universal, and therefore, totalising knowledge system in Africa. From the outset the colonial powers, especially the British, were more hesitant in the academia area because the concept and practice of Indirect Rule did not square well with making the subject peoples in Africa 'knowledgeable'. Limited forms of vocational training qualifying them for colonial service, would suffice. Apparently, the colonial powers were apprehensive of the emancipating effects of their own educational system. The *praeparatio epistemica* 'project' was carried through, however, and gained momentum during the Second World War, when British colonial authorities

reoriented their policy of Indirect Rule, and tried to identify the means by which they might maintain a hegemonic apparatus through the cultivation of consensus.

Education proved to be the spearhead of this new policy. In the same way as the 'Supreme Being' had been conceptualised by missionaries as the apex of the traditional religious systems, the university (housing ultimate secular knowledge: the Universitas) was assigned the supreme position in the formal education system imported by the colonial powers. In their eyes, and in the eyes of the later neo-colonial powers, formal education, ranging from primary schools to universities, served as the 'cultural apparatus' for fostering the homogenisation of the perspectives of identity (and thereby consensus) of the subject peoples and of their colonial masters.[20]

This 'Universitas' can also be interpreted in terms of a division of labour in the process of knowledge production. The local 'Other' in the periphery became the object of the researcher from the centre, the metropolis, who processed his 'raw material' to theory.[21] Edwin W. Smith's 'Raw Material' was a classic example of such a production of knowledge in a system connecting centre and periphery. The Beninese philosopher Pauline Hountondji characterises this division of labour as a process of extraversion leading eventually to the dependency of African academics, in the periphery. As a consequence, these academics then tend to focus in particular on the centre, i.e. on the North.

'Globalisation'

It is fashionable nowadays in social science practice to couch the discussions about the interaction between the North Atlantic and other territories in the world in terms of 'globalisation'. In these discussions, a number of perspectives can be discerned. One may define globalisation in economic terms, as transforming the world into one global market in such a way that financial transactions on one side of the globe can have painful repercussions in other parts of the world. Or one may speak, as people frequently do, about a global 'Coca-Cola-nisation' or

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[20] See especially Hannerz 1987 and 1992. If we follow Hannerz in viewing education as the 'cultural apparatus' by which 'a relative few control a largely asymmetrical flow of meanings to a great many more people' (Hannerz 1987:552), and in connecting it with the perpetuation of hegemony, Althusser and his classical *'Ideology and ideological state apparatuses'* come immediately to mind. Education, as well as religious systems, reproduce relations of power, not in terms of the classical class-distinction or the architecture of a superstructure versus an infrastructure, but rather in terms of a prescribed and internalised consensus.

[21] Escobar quotes an African scholar, Namuddu: "Our own history, culture and practices, good or bad, are discovered and translated in the journals of the North and come back to us re-conceptualized, couched in languages and paradigms which make it all sound new and novel" (Escobar 1995:46).

'McDonald-isation' as witnesses of a homogenising culture spreading 'unto the uttermost part of the earth'. Or one may view globalisation as a multifarious process of local heterogenisation and localisation of people and groups who 'translate' and appropriate external interventions into their own local context. These different definitions of globalisation have resulted from the different chronologies imputed to globalisation and vice-versa. If one regards globalisation as co-extensive with the history of humankind, the concept soon loses much of its explanatory power. A chronology, less inclusive, than this all inclusive one, seems therefore to be necessary in order to render the concept specific and unambiguous.

In this study globalisation is thus restricted to the complex modern process of the interplay between a hegemonic Westernisation, and the local actions and reactions to that process.[22] 'Globalisation' equals modern Western dominance, even though the West concealed that content by using terms such as 'global village' connoting Christian virtues of 'good neighbourliness' and 'love of one's fellow men'. 'Globalisation' signifies the historical process by which the West, during its voyages of discovery, spread out its tentacles, economically, politically, but also religiously and epistemologically, to the other parts of the world, in its attempt to bring those parts within its own sphere of influence.[23] This view on globalisation does not, of course, deny that the West itself has also been (and still is) subject to intrusion from other cultures. Modern Western science and universities would never have been able to attain their present hegemonic positions without the far-reaching influence of Arab culture in the embryonic stage of Western science. But in the quest for the ignoramus and unbeliever, an idiosyncratic process of globalisation unfolded by which the West despite its diversity, tried to exercise a homogenising hegemony to lead the unbeliever and the ignoramus to its own realm of God and Knowledge. This process of establishing and securing Western hegemony, is phrased in terms of the 'universalisation' of the - once - local. This deceptive notion of 'universalisation'

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[22] Nederveen Pieterse (2000) criticises the use of the term 'Westernisation' as a 'catch-all concept that ignores diverse historical currents'. He prefers the term 'polycentrism' which allowed him to include e.g. at what he called Japanisation and Easternisation (Nederveen Pieterse 2000:4). He may be correct in pointing at the risk of essentialising and thereby reifying the notion of 'Westernisation'. However, one wonders whether 'Easternisation' or 'Japanisation' are not purely local discourses but themselves also blends of local traditions and Western 'intrusions'. In general, Nederveen Pieterse is highly critical of the 'post-developmentalists' like Escobar who tend to throw out the baby (development) with the bath water (of the development discourse).

[23] Mazrui rightly points to the phenomenon of the slave trade as an intrinsic element of globalisation (Mazrui 1998).

is questioned in the following sections, which are the result of my own intellectual quest.

In my opinion, 'globalisation' implies a continuous reduction of local traditions to fit the dominant standard set by the West. However, this reduction resulted in local processes of assimilation, incorporation and rejection, and in this way, globalisation actually represents an adulterated hegemonisation. The centre uses not only force but also strives for consensus, in order to perpetuate its position. From this Gramscian notion of hegemony, I return to the centre-versus-periphery model, although this model is much more complex than the one-dimensional structure so favoured by the *Dependentistas* of the 1970s. 'Global' necessarily implies 'local' in this model, and vice versa. The centre is at the same time periphery, and vice versa. We need to think in terms of a pluri-dimensional context and in terms of a multiplicity of centres and peripheries. After the deadlock in the development-theory which followed a more restricted economist, homogeneous neo-Marxist development model, new modes of thinking about social development concentrate on research into, and the explanation of, different kinds of 'diversity' at both the macro- and micro-levels.[24] This diversity has become apparent in the complexities of global and local, dominance and subordination, centre and periphery, at different levels.

The persons we meet in this study are all part of the micro level. Whereas Edwin W. Smith left his 'centre' and travelled to the 'periphery of the periphery' of the unknown 'Other', the Ugandan poet and scholar Okot p'Bitek moved from this alleged 'periphery' to the alleged 'centre' in order to undergo or, perhaps more aptly, to endure, his intellectual formation. This duality was, and still is, at work in the domain of the 'christianisation' and 'epistemisation' of Africa, and it still determines the processes of incorporation and rejection within these domains. Duality still determines how the relationship between Europe and Africa is actually put into practice; a relationship still guided and perpetuated by the Eurocentric paradigm of development. This paradigm, couched implicitly in the notions of *praeparatio evangelica* and *praeparatio epistemica*, has evoked processes of assimilation and incorporation of Western views and values, as well as resistance to them, into the 'outer provinces ' of the West.

Double consciousness

My article *Honest to Jok* focuses on the works of Okot p'Bitek. The central theme is 'opposition' although Okot p'Bitek's assimilation and incorporation of 'metropolitan thinking' also plays a constitutive role. Instead of an 'authenticity of

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[24] See e.g. David Booth 1993.

identity', we discern in Okot p'Bitek several identities, namely that of a poet, an *a*-theist, a scholar and a cultural nationalist. Together they constitute a life-long process of what has been labelled the 'creolisation' of different cultural assumptions, leading to a multiplicity of different cultural orientations. Okot p'Bitek is the perfect hinge in this study, because it is he who explicitly opposed the Western intrusive construction of identity of both the unbeliever and the ignoramus in Africa. In expressive, and at times heated language, he denounced the hegemonisation project in the domains of religion and academia. He bridged the Negritude-movement and the de-colonizing-the-mind-programme of such writers as the Kenyan Ngugi. At the same time, however, we see a process of 'double consciousness' in him, because Westernisation coupled to the process of modernisation have indelibly put their stamp on him. The term 'double consciousness' was used for the first time by the Pan-Africanist W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963), who wrote in his *The Souls of Black Folks*:

> It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body. (W.E.B. du Bois 1986: 2)

In the available biographical information about Okot p'Bitek, his parents are portrayed as people who, on the one hand, were strongly connected to their own local culture and traditions, including dance and orality, but on the other hand, were also influenced by the missionaries who worked in the area inhabited by the Acholi. A particular cultural creolisation must have moulded Okot p'Bitek as he tried to work out some coherence between these different 'worlds', both in his literary and in his scholarly work, despite the fact that he became a vehement critic of the external interventions parading behind the masks of 'God' and 'Knowledge' at the same time. In this respect, Abiola Irele rightly points to the 'blurring of the distinction between scholarly work and ideological activity' by many African intellectuals (Irele 1991: 58).

This process of creolisation, of blending different cultural orientations, has been (and still is!) problematic and presents intriguing paradoxes. Okot, who criticised Western academics and missionaries who were trying to forge the 'Other' into their hegemonising definition, could not entirely escape their defining power. His final trust in ratio and science, his rejection of theism (inspired by the God-is-dead-theology, as we will see), located him also in the realm of the

Western modernist fulfilment-ideology. His passionate criticism of the external alienating education-system imported by the colonial powers into their colonies, was partly articulated through academic channels and in front of a university audience, both in Africa and in Europe, as well as in America. We shall see that the Kenyan writer Ngugi uncovered the same paradoxes. The contradictions inherent in the distinction 'global' versus 'local' became apparent in a concise way in Okot's writings. Indeed, opposition and assimilation fused in Okot, and Lawino and Ochol perhaps resemble each other more than Okot would admit.

Localisation; shifting answers

The thread throughout this study is the 'power of defining', at work both in the domain of religion and of 'academia' in Africa, although this mechanism did not necessarily lead to more or less analogous outcomes. Both domains are relatively autonomous, and have led to different articulations of reactions to external interventions.

As I indicated earlier, the period of Christianisation preceded that of the Western 'export of knowledge'. The *praeparatio evangelica* seems to have been a phase in which attempts to reduce local religious systems provoked considerable opposition. The confrontation of orthodox Christian missionaries with local religious systems in Africa, prepared the way for the amalgamations of the Christian faith with a local religion, such as was the case in several of the so-called African Independent Churches. These African Independent Churches cannot be seen as merely local reactions to external interventions, although the processes of assimilation, incorporation, and creolisation of religious systems, do seem to have been stronger in the domain of religion than in the domain of 'knowledge'. One important factor in this respect has been the translation of the Gospel into the many vernacular languages of Africa.[25] As Okot p'Bitek points out in his *African Religions in Western Scholarship*, however, such translations frequently resulted in distorted images of the local religions, although the vernacular did give people the opportunity to include an external religious system into a local one and thereby localise it. In this respect, the domain of religion proved to be inclusive to a certain extent, whilst demarcation separating other (external) religious systems was less articulate.

Science, and the universities as the academic institutions in which it was mainly practised, on the other hand, were to a large extent conceptualised and constituted as external (neo-)colonial interventions, resulting in the marginalisation of local systems of knowledge. The academia and the knowledge it embodied,

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[25] See e.g. Lamin Sanneh 1992.

seemed to bear a stronger mark of 'exclusiveness', in that it carried with it the exclusive, and excluding, use of a colonial language. Despite discussions about certain amalgamations of local traditions of knowledge and 'modern' science, also within the edifice of a university, universities in Africa seem to have been the paradigmatic centres which have automatically adopted an extravert attitude by orienting themselves exclusively to the academic centres in the North. Undoubtedly, this extraversion is partly motivated by the sheer fact that it gives people a better chance of acquiring more social, cultural and ultimately also economic, capital (i.e. 'capital' defined in Western terms!). Returning to the globalisation-discussion, it may seem that the process of homogenisation is more powerful in the domain of knowledge[26], whilst in the domain of religion, diversity and localisation seem to have had a stronger impact.

This process of homogenisation of knowledge is still boosted by the dominant position of the paradigm of development in the field of co-operation with African universities. In my article *Wipe the blackboard clean…!*, I take a critical view of the present practice of inter-university development co-operation in as far as it is conducive to the process of creating homogeneity. By analysing the present condition of African universities, I demonstrate in this article, that pivotal questions related to the construction of cultural identities are not being raised. In my opinion, major donor-agencies, including the World Bank, and counterpart-universities in the North, tend to think in terms of a universally valid university practice and epistemology which is not automatically congruous with different cultural settings.

However, by looking at inter-university co-operation from the angle of a potential analogy with the domain of religion, it might be possible to introduce a process of striving for diversity into inter-university co-operation. Such a process may strengthen an endogenous development towards 'African Independent Universities' in Africa and result in the localisation, and thereby in the appropriation, of heterogeneous systems of knowledge. In this way, local knowledge might amalgamate with Western academic knowledge in hybrid knowledge institutions.

This brings me to the notion of indigenous knowledge which seems to be in vogue in some development-circles. By integrating this concept in a Western discourse of 'development' – which implies the dichotomy of the developed *versus* the not (yet) developed) - it has become isolated from its local context

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[26] Thomas Scott talks about an 'evolving world science as a global institutionalisation of the cosmopolitan scientific tradition that was first institutionalised in Europe' (Scott 1993, downloaded text).

which, in its turn, has resulted in a reinforcement of divided tracks of knowledge systems. In this regard, the concept of indigenous knowledge has not (yet) been able to play the role that African religion as confessed and practised in African Independent Churches, has played and still continues to play in the localisation of imported religion. In the present donor-driven approach, it seems as if 'indigenous knowledge' is being extracted like a raw material from its local cultural context, then appropriated and finally processed and redefined by Western academics and development-gurus.[27] From this angle, an analogy with the process by which early missionaries, including Edwin W. Smith, redefined the concept 'African Traditional Religion' as a prescription for the 'other', forces itself upon us.

Coda

By raising questions about a 'prescribed' identity of African universities, I do not intend to suggest that the right should be withheld from African nations to develop an institutional capacity of their own for academic knowledge of the kind that was developed in the West in past centuries. Such a suggestion would reveal that I myself have fallen into the power-of-defining trap of which has been the object of my criticism throughout this study.

In the light of the argument developed here, the co-operation project between Utrecht University and the University of Zimbabwe to which I referred at the beginning of this chapter, may be said to have been beneficial to both partners. It is imperative that the claim of exclusiveness in respect of scientific knowledge be dropped, in order to change its totalising character. This means that donor-agencies and partner-universities from the North, will need to re-conceptualise their assistance programmes accordingly. It is important to leave enough room for a local diversity of different knowledge systems to develop.

There also needs to be room, however, for what Huff (1993) called, 'neutral zones', in which institutions such as universities can develop, without the constant threat of intervention from local civil or military regimes.

[27] See e.g. Agrawal's critical article of 1995.

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'Knowing the African'[1]

Edwin W. Smith and the Invention of 'African Traditional Religion'

> They say that they are merely *doar*, simple people, and how can simple people know about such matters? What happens in the world is determined by Spirit and Spirit can be influenced by prayer and sacrifice. This much they know, but no more; and they say, very sensibly, that *since the European is so clever perhaps he can tell them the answer to the question he asks* (E.E. Evans-Pritchard 1956: 316; my italics).

Introduction

Nowadays books with 'three-dimensional' picture cards are available in every bookshop. At first sight, they display merely a regularly repeated configuration of lines and colours apparently devoid of image, meaning or message. When one holds a card close to one's eyes, however, and focuses on it in a particular manner, a hidden image with a remarkably clear, and hitherto hidden, image emerges from the paper and gradually comes into full view. It may be assumed that the hidden depths of texts could likewise be made to reveal themselves, by examining them and their contexts closely. In this article, texts on the construct 'African Traditional Religion' are scrutinised in order to reveal layers of meaning, previously concealed during the process of textualisation, i.e. in the intricate process of observing, interpreting, conceptualising, and finally committing one's interpretation to paper. This process produces a text which is then subject to re-interpretation by those who read it.

The subject of the October 1990 issue of the journal *Religion*, was 'African Religions'. The contributions by Hackett and Shaw focused on the concept of 'African Traditional Religion' as a cultural construct.[2] They located its origin in the Judaeo-Christian terminology and theology used by missionaries when 'translating' elements of the belief-systems of the peoples they were trying to convert.

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[1] This paper will be published in: Gerrie ter Haar and Jim Cox (eds.), *Uniquely African?,* spring 2001.

[2] Hackett 1990, and Shaw 1990 (a). Shaw did not define the concept 'cultural construction' but referred to Mudimbe (1988) who spoke about European constructions of Africa as elements of a discourse. Hackett used the term 'construction of cultural categories and the ideological foundations of academic discourse' (Hackett 1990: 303).

Both Hackett and Shaw emphasised the important role which Geoffrey Parrinder, and his 'decontextualised ''catalogue'' style' (Shaw 1990a: 343), played in the development of the concept 'African Traditional Religion'. It was, moreover, Parrinder who was the first to use it in his *African Traditional Religion* (1954).[3] Its adoption and propagation by leading African theologians, like E. Bolaji Idowu and John S. Mbiti, in the period of cultural and religious decolonisation and Africanisation, made 'African Traditional Religion' a dominant paradigm in the study of indigenous religions in Africa. Westerlund also had shown earlier how this concept of 'African Traditional Religion' was institutionalised in many departments of Religious Studies in African universities.[4] As Shaw says:

> 'African Traditional Religion' was constructed as a single, pan-African belief system comparable to Christianity, a mega-homology in comparison to the much more limited delineation of equivalence (and presumed African inferiority) in missionary cultural translations and in the work of scholars such as Westermann. (Shaw 1990a: 345)

The aim of this article is to study constituents of the genesis of the 'African Traditional Religion' construct. By going beyond Parrinder, I wish to identify scholars who may be regarded as the pioneers of this concept, and I intend to reconstruct how, and under what circumstances, African religious systems began to be translated into Christian terminology and theology.

I will concentrate on the influence of Edwin W. Smith (1876-1957), editor of the publication *African Ideas of God*, in laying the foundation of the concept of 'African Traditional Religion'. I want to show that Smith was one of the pioneers in defining the contours of this concept to which others later turned for reference. This is not to downplay the importance of individuals in the history of missionary work in Africa, such as Bishop Colenso in South Africa, who deviated from the general pattern of derogatory thinking about African religions. These individuals cannot, however, be grouped together in a 'strategic location' in terms of a coherent body of texts on 'African Traditional Religion', they served as what we might call 'proto-pioneers'.

I will make use of the concept of 'Orientalism' developed by Edward Said, in order to localise the position and influence of Edwin W. Smith. By using the concept of 'Orientalism', Said tried to unmask the intricate relationship between knowledge and power. If one 'knows' a person or a group, one is in a position to

[3] Personal communication by Prof. Geoffrey Parrinder.
[4] Westerlund 1985. See also Platvoet 1989.

‘master’ that person or group intellectually. That domination, however, also affects the knowledge which is acquired and the ways in which it is translated into our own codes. In my opinion, Western missionaries played a critical role in ‘knowing’, and thereby domesticating, the religious ‘Other’ through a Western epistemological order.

The contribution of Edwin W. Smith

Biographical material[5]

Edwin W. Smith was born on 7 September 1876 in Aliwal North (Cape Province, South Africa) which was the main centre of the Primitive Methodist Mission in Southern Africa. His father, John Smith, was an influential minister in the Primitive Methodist Church, which had separated from the Wesleyan Methodists in Britain in the early 19th century, not so much because of differences in theological doctrines but because it held open-air-camp-meetings during which efforts were made to reach the poorer classes in the Midland industrial areas. This approach was condemned by the Wesleyan Methodist authorities as ‘extreme revivalism’ (Bolink 1967: 65-79).

The mission activities of the Primitive Methodists, as they were called, were initially limited to their home country, but in 1860, the church decided to start missionary work in Africa which resulted in the opening of the Aliwal North mission in 1870. John Smith was posted there in 1874, a strong advocate, as he was, of the Primitive Methodists expanding their mission work to include other regions in Africa. After a tour to the French missionaries in Basutoland in 1884, he reported:

> I saw exactly what I wanted to see - a real missionary agency in full operation, and a heathen people in the process of being transformed into a Christian nation. This has made me more dissatisfied than ever with our position at Aliwal. It has become to me simply unbearable. If we mean to do lasting missionary work we must go out into the clear open field of untouched heathenism. (quoted by Bolink 1967: 68)

In 1888 the Smith family returned to England, where John Smith served as Missionary Secretary of the Primitive Missionary Committee. He was the driving force behind the missionary expansion of the Primitive Methodists who decided in 1888 to open a mission in the land of the Mashukulumbwe, as the Ila people

[5] McVeigh, 1974, gives a short biography of Edwin W. Smith, and the Rev. John Young has recently completed a biography of him.

were called at the time, in what is now Zambia. It was not until 1893 that the first Primitive Methodist pioneer missionaries reached the area of the Mashukulumbwe. There can be little doubt that John Smith had a lasting influence on young Edwin. Not only his missionary zeal but his progressive thinking with an open mind for other religions, must also have impacted strongly on Edwin who later decided to follow in his father's footsteps.

Edwin Smith was sent to Elmfield College, the Primitive Methodist boarding school in York. Despite the fact that he had no formal theological education, he was nonetheless allowed to the Primitive Methodist Church ministry in 1897 and left Great Britain, for his missionary work in Africa among the Ila, in 1898. He worked first of all in Basutoland with the French missionaries who had been visited by his father, and received his training in the local African languages there. Due to the Anglo-Boer War, he had to wait until 1902 before he and his wife could travel to Northern Rhodesia. In July 1902, he arrived at Nanzela, his first mission post, and during his stay there, he wrote his Handbook of the Ila language which was published in 1907 by Oxford University Press. In that same year, the Smith family returned to England on furlough.

They returned to Africa in 1909 and established a new station in Kasenga. In the period that followed, Smith worked, together with Andrew Murray Dale (resident magistrate in Namwala), on the ethnography *The Ila-speaking peoples of Northern Rhodesia*. In 1915, he returned to England. Being a diabetic, it proved impossible for him to return for longer periods to Africa.

He then served as a chaplain with the British troops in Belgium, and later he found a job with the British and Foreign Bible Society, firstly as a secretary for Italy and later for Western Europe. He became literary superintendent in 1922 and editorial superintendent in 1932. In this capacity, he was given the ultimate responsibility for the translation activities of the society. He left the society in 1939.

Smith was one of the founding fathers of the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures, established in 1926. He served as a member of its Executive Council, his fellow members including Sir F.D. Lugard, Prof. Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, Dr. J.H. Oldham, the Rev. Prof. Wilhelm Schmidt svd and Prof. C.S. Seligman. He had joined the Royal Anthropological Institute as an Ordinary Fellow in 1909 and served the Institute as its President from 1933-1935.[6]

Smith went on to serve as Visiting Professor at Hartford Seminary, Connecticut, from 1939-1943, and at Fisk University (Tennessee) from 1943-

[6] His second Presidential Address was entitled: *Africa: What do we know of it?* In the conclusion Smith gave the following answer: 'Very little as yet' (Smith 1935: 81).

1944. In 1937, he received an honorary D.D. from Wesley College, Winnipeg. He was the editor of *Africa* from 1945 to 1948. Smith was married to Julia Fitch who died in 1952. They had two children: a son, who died during their mission period in Africa, and a daughter. Smith died on 23 December 1957.

Edwin W. Smith and 'African Traditional Religion'

As editor of *African Ideas of God*, Smith wrote a 35-page comprehensive introduction which I take as the synopsis of his thinking on African religions. He started with a reference to a meeting he once had with Emil Ludwig in Khartoum.

> One of my fellow-guests was the eminent biographer, Emil Ludwig. Having learnt that I had been a missionary in Central Africa, he drew me aside after the meal and questioned me at great length - indeed, he monopolized me for the rest of the evening. 'What does Christianity do for the African?' he asked. 'Does it increase his personal happiness, and if so, how?' I spoke of the release from fears. 'What fears, and how release?' I pictured the fears and told how we try to induce a personal trust in a living, present, loving God who is stronger than any evil power. Mr Ludwig was puzzled. 'How can the untutored African conceive God?' It surprised him when I said there was no need to persuade pagan Africans of the existence of God: they are sure of it, but not sure of Him as a living power in their individual experience. He was frankly incredulous. 'How can this be?' he said. 'Deity is a philosophical concept which savages are incapable of framing.' I doubt whether I convinced him. (Smith 1950:1)

It is not without reason that this short story frequently featured in later apologetic contributions on 'African Religion'[7], the authors of which all had but one objective which they shared with the contributors to *African Ideas of God*: i.e. to show that Africans were indeed capable of framing deity as a philosophical concept. The aim of the publication was thus clearly defined by Smith: 'Among Africans who have not come under the influence of Islam, Judaism or Christianity, is there any awareness of God? If so, what idea of Him have they formed?' (Smith 1950: 1).

According to Smith, symbols played a dominant role in the religious thinking of Africans, who used symbols to express their religious feelings. Smith related his analysis of the role of symbols in African religions to a discussion of the origin of religion:

[7] e.g. Uka in Uka 1991: 40, Awolalu in Uka 1991: 125, Idowu E.B. 1962: 30, Tasie 1976: 57.

> Obeying the universal impulse to exteriorize the emotionally apprehended supersensible world, Africans take, for the most part, celestial phenomena as symbols of the Supreme Being. [.....] Such symbols not only spring from emotion; they generate emotions of awe and gratitude which are directed towards the Deity they symbolize. (Smith 1950: 13)

Here Smith follows the tradition of scholars like R.R. Marett and Rudolf Otto, for whom the concept of awe was crucial to their theory of the early development of religion. Religion was held to have developed in stages or phases. Smith referred to Marett's sketch of its development to the stage in which a transcendent Personality, a Creator, emerges (Smith 1950: 14). As the title *African Ideas of God* already implies, the dominant theme is theism, it is about African Ideas of **God**. Smith set out, therefore, 'to relate the African's theism (such as it is) to other phases of his religion' (Smith 1950: 15). These phases are spiritism and dynamism. In line with Marett, Smith concluded that these stages, phases or categories, 'may certainly be found existing contemporaneously among any one people' (Smith 1950: 13).

The lowest of the three stages, dynamism, was discussed first by Smith and he defined it as:

> the belief in, and the practices associated with the belief in, impersonal, pervasive power or energy, something akin to the Polynesian *mana*, which is likened to an electrical fluid that could charge persons and things, and be diverted from one to another. (Smith 1950: 16)

The whole concept of dynamism became the object of an academic debate strongly influenced by the work of Placide Tempels who wrote a small, but very influential, book on Bantu philosophy. Early concepts of dynamism, drawing on the Polynesian idea of a cosmic Mana, as defined by Codrington, focused on a mystic energy believed to occupy African practice and thought. This energy was interpreted as one continuum, all-pervasive, in things and men. The concept Tempels was focusing on, was a *force vitale* in terms of individual forces differentiated in kind and classes according to the potency of their *force vitale*.

The major question for Smith was how to relate the phase of dynamism to theology; what is the connection between this essential energy and the belief in God? In other words: is the Supreme Power thought of as 'It' or 'He'? (Smith 1950: 20-21). He defined a number of criteria in order to distinguish the High God from the cosmic Mana. The High God has personality, a personal name, He

has a life and consciousness, He is anthropomorphic, He is a Being who is not human, He is Creator or Constructor, He is ultimate power and authority, He is worshipped and he is regarded as judge (Smith 1950: 21-22).

> These criteria, as readers may apply them to the deities described in the following chapters, lead me to the judgement that we have to do with a High God and not with 'an abstract Power or natural potency', Cosmic Mana. (Smith 1950: 22)

According to Smith, 'so many Africans are aware of Something, other than themselves and other than the Supreme Being, that makes for righteousness' (Smith 1950: 23). This missing link between dynamism and theism is the phase of spiritism which Smith defined as:

> the belief in, and the practices associated with the belief in, beings who are either *(a)* free nature spirits who never were human, or *(b)* discarnate human spirits. (Smith 1950: 23)

In spiritism, the emphasis among the Bantu is on 'human beings who continue to live in the unseen world' (Smith 1950: 23). These are called the *mizimu*. Spiritism is important, because it gave Smith a clue to the understanding of a fundamental characteristic of 'African religion': 'It is an essential element in African belief that 'living' and 'dead' live in symbiosis, interdependent, capable of communicating one with the other' (Smith 1950: 24). The *mizimu* especially determine the well-being of people. They are the 'guardians of traditional morality' (Smith 1950: 25). Taking the unseen world as his starting point, Smith went on to define religion:

> If the essence of religion is a sense of dependence upon supersensible powers who are able and willing to help, then we are in the presence of religion when Africans commune with their kinsmen in the unseen world, who have enhanced powers associated with their new status and particularly as mediators between man and God. (Smith 1950: 26)

Mediators are necessary because in Smith's perception of 'African religion', God is 'the complete Other, the absolute sovereign, external to his own creation, so far remote in his solitary glory as to be unapproachable save through intermediaries' (Smith 1950: 27). At the same time, this God is thought to be immanent in man: 'But God is not all unlike man' (Smith 1950: 27). Smith was now finally entering

the third phase of religion, i.e. theism. He observed Africans seeking power to satisfy their physical and psychical needs. ‘He wants to feel safe in this uncertain and hostile world’ (Smith 1950: 28), and many of these needs are satisfied by his dynamism and spiritism.

> But alike in the experience of individuals and of society, Africans sooner or later reach the frontier line beyond which neither dynamism nor spiritism can satisfy their needs: they do not meet all the facts, nor adequately solve the problems of life. That is where God comes in. He is the ultimate Controller of natural forces and of human destiny. (Smith 1950: 29)

‘In short, God is the last resort when all other helpers fail’ (Smith 1950: 30). Having said this, Smith needed to answer just one more important question: ‘How came Africans, like other peoples of simple nature, to conceive the idea of God?’ (Smith 1950: 30). Smith raised a possibility which brought him back within the parameters of his own concept of religion:

> This intellectual argument [i.e. the natural curiosity] is accompanied by, or induced by, an emotional apprehension. [...] the inquiry ends in the wonder of awe, before that which, the more it is understood, by so much the more transcends our understanding. [....] Africans share in that wonder, inarticulate as they may be... (Smith 1950: 30-31)

This last sentence is the clue to the further understanding of Smith's thinking on ‘African religion’. All human beings share the wonder of awe simply because ‘the self-revelation of God is present and continuous’ (Smith 1950: 32). Here we are clearly entering the area of theology, a liberal theology of fulfilment. Smith was taking a stance against the theology of Karl Barth, the theologian who can be regarded as the leading proponent of the exclusive revelation through Jesus Christ. Smith here approvingly quoted the theologian Emil Brunner who wrote: ‘Apart from real revelation the phenomenon of religion cannot be understood. Even the most primitive polytheistic or pre-polytheistic idolatrous religion is unintelligible without the presupposition of the universal revelation of God which has been given to all men through Creation’ (Smith 1950: 32).

Edwin W. Smith's writings

Edwin W. Smith was a prolific writer.[8] The development of his thinking about African religion can be traced in the following publications.[9] I have already referred to the ethnography that he wrote jointly with Andrew Murray Dale *The Ila-speaking Peoples of Northern Rhodesia*, which was published in 1920 although the text had already been completed in 1915 (Smith & Dale 1920: preface, x). The parts dealing with the belief-system of the Ila were written by Smith, and they carried all the hallmarks of an evolutionary scheme of things ranging from dynamism to theism and the Supreme Being. It seems justified to argue that his stay among the Ila was decisive for his thinking on 'African Religion'. This material is interesting therefore, because the ethnography was one of the first of Smith's books in which he speaks about religious beliefs of African, and also because some of the epistemological problems we have touched upon can be elaborated on through this material.

I analysed the text of the ethnography dealing with the belief-system of the Ila, in another article[10]. I will now briefly highlight some of Smith's other publications, written and published between the publication of the ethnography in 1920 and his *African Ideas of God* in 1950.

In 1923 a booklet was published with the intriguing title *The Religion of Lower Races, as Illustrated by the African Bantu*, a title which indicated his evolutionary scheme of thinking. It has to be said, however, that Smith apologised for this title which the publishers had forced upon him. Twenty years later, in fact, he refused to sign a copy of it in the New York Library,[11] indeed he omitted the title of this booklet from all subsequent lists of his books. The content of this booklet was actually a 'dress rehearsal' of the scheme developed in the Ila ethnography: it started with dynamism and ended with the Supreme Being, although the latter part was not developed so well as it was in his other works.

The Secret of the African, published in 1929, contained the lectures which Smith had delivered at the invitation of the Church Missionary Society in 1927 and 1928. In nine chapters, Smith unfolded his ideas on 'African religion' for an apparently missionary audience. Referring to Rudolf Otto's *Das Heilige* (1917), 'which has exercised so great an influence over our thinking in recent years'

[8] Cf. Hastings: 'its [Africa's, HvR] chosen author was the scholarly Edwin Smith who had been born on a South African mission station in 1876, had become a master of Bantu languages as well as a Methodist missionary in central Africa, the writer of a prodigious number of books about African and missionary subjects and, in 1950, had only just given up the editorship of the International African Institute's quarterly Africa' (Hastings 1979: 41).

[9] I confine myself here to the books that Smith wrote on African Religion. For an exhaustive bibliography of Smith, I refer my reader to McVeigh, 1974).

[10] Van Rinsum 1999; in this thesis.

[11] I owe this information to Rev. John Young.

(Smith 1929: 22), he followed Otto closely and defined the basis of 'African religion' as 'a feeling of the uncanny, a thrill of awe and reverence, a sense of inferiority and dependence' (Smith 1929: 21-22). In his chapter on the relationship between religion and magic, Smith, who grouped magic with dynamistic religion, openly rejected Frazer's theory on magic. Marett, however, was praised for having labelled the pre-animistic stage of religion as dynamism.

African Beliefs and Christian Faith, published in 1936, was written to serve as teaching material in Africa for African students, evangelists and pastors in Africa. It was written in Basic English in order to facilitate its subsequent translation into African languages. Smith admitted that it was certainly not meant to be a complete manual of Christian theology.

> I have limited myself to the Doctrine of God. This is, in my opinion, the most fundamental of Christian doctrines, and the most vital in teaching Africans. It provides the best approach to Africans through their own beliefs. (Smith 1936: 13)

The book is divided into three parts. Smith dealt firstly with 'Belief in God among the Africans', followed by 'Belief in God among the Jews', and finally 'The Revelation of God in Jesus Christ'. The comparison of African theism with that of the Jews was important for Smith, because the Jews 'like Africans, went far on the road but did not get into the full light' of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ (Smith 1936: 80). In this publication, Smith concentrated for obvious reasons on belief in God. It is interesting to note, however, that although his evolutionary scheme was clearly evident in his discussion of the relationship between force and God, he made no specific mention of dynamism as a developmental phase. Smith seemed to anticipate the growth of African theism through the expansion of Islam and Christianity in Africa, and in tune with it he de-emphasised his evolutionism. His emphasis on African theism can partly be explained by the fact that he was writing for an audience of African Christians.

In 1946, four years before the publication of *African Ideas of God,* a small book, entitled *Knowing the African,* was published. This was a compilation of lectures given by Smith mainly at the Canadian School of Missions at Toronto while serving as Visiting Professor at the Kennedy School of Missions in Hartford. His audience consisted primarily of candidates and missionaries on furlough. Chapter Six, 'Some Aspects of African Religion', resembles closely the matter and structure of the introductory survey in *African Ideas of God*. Religion's three phases of development, dynamism, spiritism and theism, feature prominently, but one is struck by the fact that Smith opened this chapter with

spiritism. He posited the ‘constant coming and going between the two worlds; the seen world and the unseen world’ as the key element of ‘African religion’ (Smith 1946: 103). And this division between the so-called living and the so-called dead, with its accompanying ‘reciprocal obligations’, brought him to his definition of religion:

> I believe myself that, among the many who have attempted to define religion, Schleiermacher comes nearest the truth: "The essence of the religious emotion", he said, "consists in the feeling of an absolute dependence". (Smith 1946: 105)

For yet another reason, spiritism was an important phase, in that it opened access to the theism phase. There seemed to be ‘certain powerful chiefs who remain in the unseen world to protect their community and to act as intermediaries between them and the Supreme Being’ (Smith 1946: 106). He was referring in this case to the spirit of Shimunenga, a local divinity in Kasenga which was one of Smith’s mission posts. From spiritism, Smith now turned to dynamism. He referred first of all to Frazer’s unsatisfactory distinction between religion and magic, and he observed: ‘Africans believe that something is at work - some mystic force is released and works’ (Smith 1946: 110).

> I had, I remember, reached this point in my research when Dr. Marett’s book *The Threshold of Religion* came into my hands. It was an illumination. He held out for the widest possible definition of religion. Since he wrote, the notion of pre-animistic religion has found a place in our thinking. Much of what used to be labelled Magic is now seen rather to be religious because it relates to the specific emotion of awe which men experience in the presence of the supernatural. (Smith 1946: 111)

Smith admitted here that he had borrowed the word ‘dynamism’ from Marett.[12] In this phase of dynamism, people ‘become aware of power or powers which excite wonder and awe’ (Smith 1946: 111). It is the ‘awesome holy’ (Smith 1946: 113). Smith then moved to theism as religion’s crowning phase. He began by admitting that missionaries were in for problems if they presumed to present data about theism among Africans. The following quote presents, in a nutshell the problem on which this article focuses:

> A missionary who speaks or writes on this subject expects to have his testimony

[12] In his *African Symbolism* of 1952, he traced the (use of the) concept op dynamism back to A.van Gennep (Smith 1952: 34).

> questioned. We are supposed to be incapable of weighing and criticizing the evidence, and to read much more than is warrantable into what Africans tell us, because we want to prove a thesis. We have been accused of manufacturing names for God; and some people have said that what we report as African belief is nothing more than a reflection of our own teaching. I do not admit the criticism as applicable to myself. I have no theory to maintain. I only want to get at the facts. (Smith 1946: 115)

Smith rejected Father Schmidt's theory of a primeval monotheism, Smith preferring as he did the 'Marettian scheme, viz. that Africans, and others, have risen to a recognition of a Supreme Being by personalizing the all-pervading potency of which I have spoken' (Smith 1946: 117).

The main question is whether the Power is '*He'* or '*it*'? Based upon his experiences among the Ila, Smith's conclusion is clear. The idea of a Supreme Being certainly prevailed, and the belief was that the ancestors acted as intermediaries between this Supreme Being and men. This theistic belief was, of course, a common starting point for missionaries.

> I still believe that in presenting Christianity to the African one should begin where the African has left off; and that it is for us to develop all the rich promise that lies in their awareness, however vague it may be, of a Supreme Being. We have to make God real to the Africans and lead them to concentrate upon Him all the devotion they now give to ancestral spirits and charms. (Smith 1946: 120)

Indeed, theism as the ultimate phase of the development of religion.

The definer defined

It is possible to reconstruct Smith's definition of religion on the basis of several passages in the books discussed so far.[13] Key elements in that definition were: human experience of the supernatural as real, and the sense of awe and feeling of absolute dependence before it. We can, in fact, place Smith in a tradition of defining religion as 'the manifestation of the holy' (Platvoet 1990: 200-201 ftn27). Platvoet mentions in this footnote that this tradition was usually practiced in combination with the definer of 'religion, as communication', which is also true of Smith's definition of religion.[14]

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[13] See especially Smith 1929: 22; 1946: 105, 111; 1950: 26, 27, 30-32.

[14] As early as 1907, Smith referred to Tylor and his 'minimum definition of religion' in his article *The Religion of the Bantu* (Smith 1907: 18).

This tradition stemmed from liberal theology as it developed in the second half of the 19th century. Under the strong influence of Schleiermacher, it stressed religious experience and intuition in reaction to the rationalist positivism of the Enlightenment. Major elements of liberal theology are the reality of a supernatural world and humanity's dependence on it; the *sui generis* nature of religion; and its irreducibility to a human fallacy. In addition, religion is an essential part of all human cultures. The differences in religion are the products of the relative degree to which they were affected by the phases of the postulated religious development of humankind.

This liberal theology had a formative influence on Smith. One document to support this thesis is the photograph of Smith's study at Nanzela station in 1904 mentioned by Young. It shows newspapers and many books, among them Fairbairn's *The Philosophy of the Christian Religion* (1902). Fairbairn was a leader of liberal Christian thought at the close of the 19th century; he was a favourite author of John Smith, Edwin's father, and closely associated with Dr. A.S. Peake, Tutor at the Hartley Primitive Methodist College, whose writings must also have been known to Smith.[15]

This reconstruction of Smith's definition of religion is important. It shows that Schleiermacher's feeling of dependence, Marett's definition of Mana, and Otto's concept of Awe, all moulded the minds of pioneer liberal missionaries like Smith and Junod.[16] Platvoet correctly contends that (operational) definitions of religion used by scholars, 'are derived not solely from the object of study, but from the interaction between the data of the religion(s) to be studied and the scientific interests and views of the scholar' (Platvoet 1990: 182).[17] The fact that Smith had

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[15] Cf. Young 1993: 81. Eric Sharpe in his *Comparative Religion* placed Fairbairn in the tradition of the scholars of religion who 'view the religious quest of mankind as divinely inspired, and as finding its fulfillment in Christianity' (Sharpe 1986: 149). Sharpe wrote a book with the telling title *Not to destroy but to Fulfil* (1965) in which Fairbairn also featured.

The Philosophy of the Christian Religion was published as part of the Gifford-Lectures series, as was another classic of liberal theology, *Varieties of Religious Experience* by William James (1902), a book which Smith also mentioned in his ethnography.

[16] Junod in his *The Life of a South African Tribe*: 'What is religion? It is essentially the feeling of Man's dependence on higher, supranormal powers to which he has recourse to help him in his distress' (Junod 1927: 595).

[17] Platvoet added that these interests and views, and the operational definitions of religions are 'constantly corrected and reformed' by the data. He has scholars of religion in mind who explicitly reflect on operational definitions of religions and their very limited heuristic and analytical functions. Outside this group and this use, definitions will often not be reformed by, but rather imposed upon, the data. These definitions must be subjected to the methodological prescription of reform by the data. We believe, however, that the writings of Smith, and most certainly his ethnography which was meant to be a scientific endeavour, can be analysed along the lines of the processes of interaction as outlined by Platvoet in his article.

apparently internalised this concept of religion as the manifestation of the Holy, is a major element in a recontextualisation of his writings. It must have had a decisive influence both on the way he observed the religious practices of the Ba-Ila and on the way he textualised his experiences during his stay among them. Smith perceived the deeply felt, 'innate', indigenous religious awareness of the Africans among whom he worked.

I locate Smith not as an individual in isolation, but as an important pioneer in the whole process of the development of the notion of 'African Traditional Religion'. How can we assess this fundamental shift in conceptual thinking? It was precisely the use of a specific definition of religion which provided Smith with the tool to define and subsequently, to invent 'African Religion'. Note e.g. his opinion on magic. In the Frazerian tradition, there was a sharp dividing line between magic and religion. Smith disagreed and brought magic into the realm of religion, by means of his definition. Magic was thus transformed into the dynamism phase, the phase of belief in the all-pervading force, Mana, to use Codrington's words. This is very important because Smith thereby affirmed that Africans, as people, had a religion. Moreover, the religious experiences which they had, they shared with other people, who, like them, felt dependent on the 'Other' World. And religious experiences implied that they communicated with the supernatural world, which implied, almost of necessity, the phase of spiritism. And through the 'Marettian scheme' of personalising the all-pervasive force, Smith led Africans into the phase of theism.

One may argue that Smith was merely following here along the lines of evolutionary thinking, which was common at that time. Undoubtedly, Smith was strongly influenced by evolutionary theories.[18] He often characterised the Ila as being in a state of infancy, from which they would grow to maturity.[19] But Smith did not view the differentiation of 'African religion' into phases as necessarily a linear development. And these stages of development should also not be interpreted as a linear development in the process of Smith's conceptualising of religion, because he had in 1907 already observed the existence of African theism. (Smith 1907:19)

This pyramid-like categorisation was manifest in all Smith's writings, and it was through them that this line of thinking was disseminated not only in the missionary but also in the academic circles of his time. Later scholars such as

[18] John Young mentioned that Smith had a copy of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* among his books in 1904.

[19] In his *The Religion of the Lower Races,* Smith wrote that we should remember 'that we are all pupils in God's great school and that if, by His grace, we are in the higher class, it is not for us to despise those who are in the kindergarten' (Smith 1923:8).

Parrinder, but especially Mbiti and Idowu, embarked on their work from this phase of theism at which Smith had duly arrived as a result of his evolutionary thinking.

How can we interpret Smith's position in the development of a Western discourse on 'African Traditional Religion'? I referred in my introduction to the concept of *Orientalism* as developed by Edward Said.

Orientalism and Discourse

In 1978, the Palestinian scholar of literature, Edward Said, still teaching at universities in the United States, published a book entitled *Orientalism*, in which he developed a specific notion of 'orientalism'. Building on Foucault's ideas, Said analysed Western academic discourse about the 'Orient', the East. It is, he said, a 'style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident"' (Said 1978:2). Said considered 'Orientalism' to be a 'Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient' (Said 1978: 3).

A discourse like 'Orientalism', said Said, acts within, and strengthens the existing power-relations through which We, the West, dominate the 'Other', the East (and which we try to maintain). This domination, in his view, is intimately linked to knowledge. The West is in a position to know the Orient, and to master it intellectually. A discourse like this actually constructs images of the 'Other'. I define discourse as a configuration of speaking, writing and imaging in a certain period of time, based on a regulating and controlling principle. Whether images of the 'other' are 'true' or not, is ultimately irrelevant, accepting that it is proper to a discourse to cause people to believe those images; they are prevented from questioning the 'truth' of them. All that matters is what, in practice, actually results from those images. In this way, the images determine our own practice, but also that in respect of the 'Other'.

Although discourse can be regarded as overlapping with ideology, it is in fact more comprehensive. If one takes a broad definition of ideology, e.g. that of Therborn, one is still referring to human subjectivity: it includes 'both the "consciousness" of social actors and the institutionalized thought-systems and discourses in a given society, [...] not as bodies of thought or structures of discourses *per se*, but as manifestations of a particular being-in-the-world of conscious actors, of human subjects' (Therborn 1980: 2). In the Foucault-inspired notion of discourse, this human subject is absent although, as we will see, Said deviated from Foucault in this respect. I also want to differentiate between discourse and 'invented traditions' as defined by Hobsbawm and Ranger. In their

terminology, tradition is taken to mean a 'set of practices'.[20] My interest here lies in the formation of texts from which tradition resulted.

Said has shown how the intellectual authority of the discourse of 'Orientalism' can be analysed. He distinguished between the strategic location of an author, i.e. the position of an author within his texts with regard to the material he is writing about, and the strategic formation, i.e. the relationship between text and the way clusters of texts, textual genres, in the end preserve the discourse within which they function. Authority is directly linked to 'exteriority', and this concept of exteriority is crucial.

> ....the orientalist is outside the Orient, both as an existential and as a moral fact. The principal product of this exteriority is of course representation. (Said 1978: 21)

It is interesting to note that this exteriority is also connected with a vague idea of altruism. Since the Orient is not able to represent itself, 'we' are willing to do this on its behalf. This notion was particularly strongly developed by missionaries of the past, who displayed a highly developed sense of altruism. This is well illustrated by a quote from Placide Tempels' *Bantu Philosophy*:

> We do not claim, of course that the Bantu are capable of formulating a philosophical treatise, complete with an adequate vocabulary. It is our job to proceed to such systematic development. It is we who will be able to tell them, in precise terms, what their inmost concept of being is. They will recognize themselves in our words and will acquiesce, saying, "You understand us: you know us completely: you "know" in the way we "know". (Tempels 1959: 25)

There is virtually no better way of expressing the superiority inherent in dominance through knowledge, than through the kind of altruism Tempels displayed. Through representation, the 'Other' is made 'visible':

> And these representations rely upon institutions, traditions, conventions, agreed-upon codes of understanding for their effects, not upon a distant and amorphous Orient. (Said 1978: 22)

Said has shown that the process by which the 'Other' is represented develops according to its own consistent pattern:

[20] Cf. Hobsbawm 1995: 1, in: Hobsbawm and Ranger 1995.

> My analyses consequently try to show the field's shape and internal organization, its pioneers, patriarchal authorities, canonical texts, doxological ideas, exemplary figures, its followers, elaborators, and new authorities. (Said 1978:22)

It is important to note that Said, unlike Foucault, assigned an important role to individual authors in the development of a discourse.

> Yet unlike Michel Foucault, to whose work I am greatly indebted, I do believe in the determining imprint of individual writers upon the otherwise anonymous collective body of texts constituting a discursive formation like Orientalism. The unity of the large ensemble of texts I analyze is due in part to the fact that they frequently refer to each other: Orientalism is after all a system for citing works and authors. (Said 1978: 23)

Said was interested in revealing 'the dialectic between individual text or writer and the complex collective formation to which his work is a contribution' (Said 1978: 24). He clearly diverged here, and in a fundamental way, from Foucault for whom the subjectivity of an individual writer did not matter at all. Clifford criticised Said for this 'hybrid' approach, which, in Clifford's view, resulted on the one hand in a mix of tradition and ideas, and on the other in a notion of 'discourse' inspired by Foucault, in which individuals play no role (Clifford 1988: 268-271). Although Clifford had a point here, Said's approach still seems appropriate when the aim is to understand what elements play a crucial role in the genesis of a discourse. A discourse is not a static entity but a dynamic formation. Although it must be admitted that there is no direct causal link between a subject, an author and a discourse, I follow Said in emphasising the role of authors and their texts in the formative processes of the discourse, not as subjects sustaining a discourse but as writers whose textual products relate to some extent to a body of texts.

An analysis in the vein of Said's 'Orientalism', demands that attention be paid to the role authors and texts played in the context of the power relations prevailing at the time their texts were written and read.

According to Said, an intimate relationship existed between knowledge and power. Knowledge of the 'Other' implies that one can take a position towards the 'Other'. The 'Other' is the object of scrutiny, of academic research and, in the case of Africa, of missionary zeal. Through knowledge of the 'Other', we are in a position to 'create' the origin and the future of the civilisation of the 'Other'. The 'Other' is becoming an entity, a thing.

> To have such knowledge of such a thing is to dominate it, to have authority over it. And authority here means for "us" to deny autonomy to "it" -the Oriental country- since we know it and it exists, in a sense, *as* we know it. (Said 1978: 32)

Knowledge thus acquired from a position of power will reinforce the power-relations, and this knowledge will be regarded as authoritative. Said stressed the constitutive element of unequal power-relations, indeed any writer representing a specific cultural tradition, specific cultural experience, will never escape the constitutive effect of existing power-relations of which the cultural tradition is a part.

Since its publication, '*Orientalism*' has provoked fierce criticism on the grounds that Said postulated an intimate interrelationship between knowledge and power. He has been criticised as 'totalitarian' for leaving no room, either for alternative ways of representations in the West, or for independent voices from the 'Other' side. Marcus and Fischer argued, therefore, that *Orientalism* had been effective only as a polemic and that its impact was largely confined to academics (Marcus & Fischer 1986). Despite the fundamental criticisms which have been levelled against *Orientalism*, the perspectives developed by Said offer a valuable heuristic instrument which may be usefully employed in the analysis of the ensemble of early texts on 'African Traditional Religion'.

African Traditional Religion as a discourse

What I have done in this article is to replace the concept of 'Orientalism' by the construct 'African Traditional Religion'. It emerged, after all, out of an attempt to represent the African 'Other' in his religious experience. I see 'African Traditional Religion' as part of a comprehensive Christian missionary discourse, characterised by Mudimbe as the 'authority of truth'.

> Missionary orthodox speech, even when imaginative or fanciful, evolved within the framework of what, from now on, I shall call the authority of the truth. This is God's desire for the conversion of the world in terms of cultural and socio-political regeneration, economic progress and spiritual salvation. This means, at least, that the missionary does not enter into dialogue with pagans and "savages" but must impose the law of God that he incarnates. All of the non-Christian cultures have to undergo a process of reduction to, or - in missionary language - of regeneration in, the norms that the missionary represents.[21]

[21] Mudimbe 1988: 47-48. Especially Chapter III, The Power of Speech is important in this

All elements of the religious belief-systems of those groups, subjected to missionary endeavour, were reduced in the end to the dominating system of belief propagated by those missionaries. The cultural construct 'African Traditional Religion' was therefore a constitutive part of a wider colonial discourse. The nucleus of the construct is a hierarchical pyramid-like categorisation of the religious belief systems of the African peoples which ranges from an all-pervasive power at the base to a Supreme Being at the top.

If we want to analyse the shape and organisation of the construct 'African Traditional Religion' as a body of texts as Said did for Orientalism, we have to identify pioneers, patriarchal authorities, canonical texts, followers, elaborators and new authorities. In this way, we can build up a library of knowledge on 'African Traditional Religion' and the position of Smith in this discourse.

Pioneers

I consider Western missionaries such as H.A. Junod, T. Cullen Young, J. Roscoe, D. Westermann, and Edwin W. Smith especially, to be the pioneers of a systematic, coherent development of the concept of 'African Traditional Religion'. Influenced by liberal theology, they were all working at the beginning of the 20th century in Africa, and they all showed a similar positive appreciation of the belief systems of the peoples among whom they lived. Their works were a turning point in the history of Western representation of African indigenous religions. Their appreciation of certain elements of the indigenous religions they encountered, compelled this new brand of liberal missionary to textualise their views and experiences in ethnographic texts. These textualisations, either missiological literature or anthropological material, were intended to represent the 'Other' in the individual religious experience. It resulted in a wealth of ethnographic material about different peoples in Africa. Their ethnographies were regarded as classics for many years.[22] These missionaries played a prominent role in the shift of the academic discipline of anthropology from its tradition of

respect. A dominant theme for Mudimbe was the relationship between knowledge of the 'Other' and power.

[22] Smith wrote the major part of the famous ethnography *The Ila-speaking peoples of Northern Rhodesia*. He wrote this ethnography together with Andrew M. Dale, a government official in Northern Rhodesia. H.A. Junod wrote another classic, *The Life of a South African Tribe,* about the Thonga-people.

‘armchair anthropologists in the metropolis’, to the paradigm of ‘experienced fieldworkers’.[23]

Patriarch

> When, some fifty years ago, Geoffrey Parrinder first went to work in West Africa as a young man, there was really very little at all he could have read on the subject of African Christianity. He could turn to some books on the subject of African religion and society by Edwin Smith and others. (Hastings 1990: 201)

It seems appropriate to attribute to Geoffrey Parrinder the title of patriarchal authority. In his writings, Parrinder firmly established the notion of ‘African Traditional Religion’ (in singular!) as a pan-African belief-system, notwithstanding local and regional differences. There were quite a few connections between Parrinder and Edwin W. Smith. They both started their missionary career in Africa as representatives the Methodist church. When Parrinder wrote his Ph.D.-thesis on West-African religion, Smith was one of his examiners (together with E.O. James). Smith later wrote a foreword to Parrinder’s *West African Religion* which was published in 1949 by Epworth Press.

Walls suggested that *West African Religion* was one of the first publications to introduce ‘the fourfold categorization of the divine hierarchy, based on collections of names in African languages: Supreme God, Divinities, Ancestral Spirits and power located in specific objects’ (Walls 1980: 144-145). In this respect I disagree, and refer to the writings of Edwin W. Smith who, as I have shown, laid the basis for this way the religious ‘Other’ was defined. This was also confirmed by Parrinder himself, when in 1970 he wrote that ‘Edwin Smith also gave a model for African religious thought, regarding it as a pyramid’ (Parrinder 1970: 85).

In 1954, Parrinder published *African Traditional Religion.* He was the first author to define the body of beliefs of Sub-Saharan Africa and give it a place among the ‘world religions’. But, as Walls rightly said, ‘What Parrinder has done [in his 1954 publication, HvR] was to draw out the implications of the Smith symposium’ (Walls 1980:147). Walls referred to a publication edited by Edwin W. Smith to which Parrinder also contributed. This brings us to one of the canonical texts.

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[23] In Van Rinsum 1999 (included in this thesis), I analysed the ethnographic works of some of these missionaries against the background of the discussion on the ‘ethnographic authority’ as initiated by e.g. James Clifford.

Canonical text

There is certainly not just one canonical text in the development of the discourse of 'African Traditional Religion', although I assume that the publication *African Ideas of God; a symposium,* will rank highly in any list of canonical texts.[24] Edwin W. Smith was, without any doubt, the initiator and auctor intellectualis. African theologians and African scholars of religion, like Idowu and Mbiti, frequently referred to *African Ideas of God*, first published in 1950. It looks as if, in the terminology of Edward Said, this publication acted as a canonical text, a pivot in the development of the discourse.[25] *African Ideas of God* was a publication which mainly comprised contributions from missionaries focusing on the alleged perception of God by African peoples. Westerlund characterised the publication *African Ideas of God* as the 'break-through of a theology of continuity among the Western theologically-trained scholars who were concerned with African religion' (Westerlund 1985, 51).[26] The concept of God acted as the interface between Christianity as a dominating religious system imported by Western missionaries to Africa and African Religion as defined by later African scholars of religion. Westerlund wrote:

> In the theology of continuity it is, above all, God who represents the continuity. African scholars therefore tend to accentuate His role, while the importance of other aspects of African Religion, some of which are not easily compatible with Christian theology, is played down. (Westerlund 1985:46)

Followers and elaborators

There is a clear line of succession starting from Smith and Junod as pioneer missionaries of the new type. The line proceeded from them to the authors of canonical texts such as *African Ideas of God*, to Parrinder as patriarch, and on to other scholars whom in Said's terminology might be referred to as 'followers and elaborators'. Mbiti[27] and Idowu, especially, qualify as such. On the one hand, they

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[24] Smith, Edwin W. (ed.), *African Ideas of God; A Symposium*. It was first published in 1950. In 1961, a second revised edition was published, edited by Geoffrey Parrinder, and was followed in 1966 by a third edition.

[25] Etherington referred to it as Edwin W. Smith's 'landmark anthology' (Etherington, 1996: 213).

[26] In this respect I also refer to Platvoet 1985.

[27] In his influential *African Religions and Philosophy* (1969), Mbiti did not yet follow Parrinder's unitary model. He spoke deliberately 'of African traditional religions in the plural because there are about one thousand African peoples (tribes), and each has its own religious system' (Mbiti 1969: 1). In his *An Introduction to African Religion,* he shifted from the plural to the singular, yet maintained an independent stance from the Parrinder-Idowu paradigm by

seemed to have followed the path of Smith and Parrinder. It was Parrinder who supervised Idowu's thesis for his Doctor of philosophy degree, and on which he based his later publication *Olódùmaré: God in Yoruba Belief* (Idowu 1962:viii). In 1973, Idowu published *African Traditional Religion: A Definition* in which he elaborated different aspects of African Traditional Religion, 'studied from the inside and in true perspective' (Idowu 1973: xi).

On the other hand, however, Mbiti and Idowu also specified the concept, bearing in mind that they wrote their texts, in a new era of decolonisation, from an African perspective. They tried to 'Africanise' the missionary legacy. At this point, it is relevant to refer again to Mudimbe when he argued that 'Western interpreters as well as African analysts have been using categories and conceptual systems which depend on a Western epistemological order' (Mudimbe 1988: x). This dependency on a Western paradigm is precisely the crucial issue surrounding these 'followers and elaborators'.[28] Is it at all possible for African scholars like Idowu, Mbiti, as well as successive African scholars of religion, to escape the dominant epistemological order imported and imposed by Western missionaries?

New authorities

Apart from pioneers, patriarchs, followers and elaborators, Said also discerned 'new authorities'. In recent years, such 'new authorities' have also emerged in the field of the study of the religions of Africa. Among them are African scholars such as J. Olupona, F. Mbon and U.H.D. Danfulani. They each reject the homogeneous conception of 'African Traditional Religion' because they take instead a multidisciplinary and a multi-dimensional approach, which is strongly influenced by the methodologies of the social sciences and the historical study of African societies and religions. They emphasise, in consequence, the contesting elements in the indigenous religions of particular groups which do not harmonise well with the unifying Judaeo-Christian interpretation of them.

In conclusion

Taking Said's programmatic design, I have concentrated in this article on one missionary pioneer in particular, Edwin W. Smith. What he did in his writings was to *re*-present the religious 'Other'. As an element of a discourse, this

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never writing 'African Traditional Religion', but consistently terming it 'African religion'.

[28] I refer to Platvoet, 1996, who made a distinction between 'Africa as object' and 'Africa as subject' in the history of the study of religions of Africa. In the discourse-perspective, the polarity of 'object' versus 'subject' as 'insider' versus 'outsider', loses some of its relevance. In a footnote, Platvoet himself characterised these categories as 'problematic' (Platvoet 1996: 105).

knowledge of the ‘Other’, which is based on representation, will in turn function as what I call prescriptive knowledge for the ‘Other’. Because a discourse functions within existing power-relationships, the ‘Other’ eventually ‘recognizes’ himself in the representation constructed of him. From this angle, conversion is not an active achievement of an individual opting to adhere to another religion for whatever reason, but rather a subtle process of recognizing an imposed image of one’s ‘self’.[29]

The use of the definition of religion as the manifestation of the Holy had another significant rationale, in this context. It is important to note that the tradition of defining religion in this way, stemmed from a group of scholars such as Rudolf Otto who worked and lived within the boundaries of a distinctive, Protestant, tradition. Balagangadhara (1994) defended his point of view, in his massive and provocative thesis, that it is Christianity itself that disallows something ‘other’ to religion. Referring to Schleiermacher and Otto in particular, Balagangadhara argued that the definition of religion as the individual religious expression of the Holy, the wholly ‘Other’, presupposed the Christian religion as a framework of ‘religion’.

From this perspective, that group of early missionary pioneers undoubtedly played a crucial role in the development of the discourse on ‘African traditional religion’. On the one hand, it was they who ascertained that pagans in Africa had ‘another’ religion, i.e. an ‘African religion’. On the other hand, however, they defined it as one which foreshadowed the Christian religion, thereby not only dominating it and relegating it to the distinctly inferior position of a precursor, but also effacing its otherness as an historically distinct and independent object of research. As Balagangadhara stated:

> In simple terms, the basic mechanism in the spread of religion is its *effacing of the otherness of the other*. The other is transformed into an ‘image’ of the self. Otherness becomes another variant of the self. There is no ‘other’ to religion - but merely another religion. Effacing the otherness is possible if and only if there exists a framework which does not allow an otherness. [.....]
> This is how the heathen and the pagan - peoples without religions - end up being incorporated into theology: members of the pagan religions. (Balagangadahra 1994: 368)

[29] See also Mudimbe who characterised ‘”African conversion” as ‘the sole position the African could take in order to survive as a human being’ (Mudimbe 1988: 48).

Representing the religious ‘Other’ in a context of domination, produces a specific definition of the religious ‘Other’. But at the same time the reverse is also true. The use of a certain definition of religion, produces a specific representation of the religious ‘Other’. Edwin W. Smith was very influential, in both missionary and academic circles, in propagating a specific concept of the religion of the ‘Other’ by defining and representing African religion as ‘another religion’, albeit one awaiting fulfilment.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to Utrecht University for offering me a research grant which gave me the opportunity to write this article.
I would like to thank the Reverend W. John Young, Dr. Jim Cox of the Edinburgh University, Professor Gerrie ter Haar and Professor Arie de Ruijter, Director of the Research School CERES, for their continuous support.
My special thanks extend to Dr. Jan Platvoet of the Faculty of Theology, Leiden University, and Dr. Jan de Wolf, at the Department of Anthropology of Utrecht University both of whom assisted me greatly in the crucial part of the textualisation of my ideas.

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n.d. Unpublished manuscript (biography of Edwin W. Smith)

Edwin W. Smith and his 'Raw Material';

Texts of a missionary and ethnographer in context[1]

Introduction

In 1924, the missionary Edwin W. Smith contributed, in *The Aldersgates Magazine* of the Primitive Methodist Missionary Society, a number of short articles in which he related his experiences in Africa, spanning the years 1902-1915, to his missionary audience. One article includes a photograph, taken by Smith himself, of two members of the Ila-people. The caption reads: 'The Raw Material'.[2] This picture and its caption reflect a multi-layered dimension of Smith's experiences in Africa.

The picture gives his audience the notion of authority behind his representation of the Ila-people. His audience is induced into the feeling of 'being there' because he has been there. But the caption also captures the notion of 'raw material' that needs to be processed in order, in this case, to produce a true Christian convert in a sea of darkness. And finally, this 'raw material' about this bizarre, extraordinary 'Other' was transmitted to academics in Europe who then proceeded to process it into grand theories.

In 1920, the ethnography *The Ila-speaking peoples of Northern Rhodesia*[3] was published. The authors were the missionary Edwin. W. Smith and the resident magistrate Andrew Murray Dale. The table of contents of the two-volume ethnography marks Edwin W. Smith as the author of the major part of the text. Seven years earlier, the first edition of *Life of a South African Tribe*, written by Henri A. Junod[4], had been published. Junod worked for years as a missionary with the people he called the Thonga. These two authors followed their calling and devoted years of their life to missionary work. They were called to the mission field by their religion, their system of meaning, a system they wanted to share with others.

But at the same time, these ethnographies can also be seen as a textualisation of a specific model of participant observation resulting in a wealth of ethnographic material about two different groups in Africa. Two ethnographies that were accepted for years as 'classics' and models for others.

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[1] An earlier version of this paper was published in *Anthropos* 94.1999: 351-367. I am grateful for permission to publish this version.

[2] fiche no. 569 (H-2723) Box No. 6 (3). African Papers-E.W. Smith.

[3] Smith, E.W. and Dale, A.M. *The Ila-speaking peoples of Northern Rhodesia*, 1920. A second edition was published in 1968, for which Elizabeth Colson wrote an Introduction.

[4] Junod, H.A., *Life of a South African Tribe*, 1912. 2nd Edition was published in 1927.

A predominant subject of their specific participant observation was the system of religion practiced by the Ila and the Thonga peoples. This observation finally resulted in a text. There is, in other words, a particular correlation and interaction between the actual observation by missionaries, emanating from the authors' own spiritual and religious environment, the actual system of religion of the peoples observed, and the final texts produced by the two authors. The material they produced proved to be very influential, serving as it did as an authoritative source for later African scholars of religion and anthropologists. Our two missionaries unwittingly referred to a number of epistemological issues that feature prominently in the debate surrounding post-modern anthropology focusing on problems of the notion of ethnographic authority.

The missionaries published their major ethnographic works in a period in which anthropology was developing into an academic discipline. The period 1900-1920 was a period of transition in British anthropology.[5] Firstly E.B. Tylor, and later J.G. Frazer, both archetypal armchair anthropologists, established a system of division of labour between the periphery and their own metropolis, in the production of knowledge and theories about the 'Other'. Within the metropolis of the emerging British Anthropology, they developed their theoretical perspectives of evolutionary intellectualism, for which they depended on the 'facts' provided by colonial administrators, missionaries and merchants.[6] To this end, the *Notes and Queries* were published in 1874 in order 'to promote accurate anthropological observation on the part of travellers, and to enable those who are not anthropologists themselves to supply the information which is wanted for the scientific study of anthropology at home' (quoted by Stocking 1983:72). Both Tylor and Frazer were closely involved in trying to improve the quality and quantity of ethnographic data on which they relied for their grand theories. Tylor made a significant contribution to the formulation of *Notes and Queries*, echoing his own theoretical thinking. In 1887, Frazer developed his own *Questions on the manners, customs, religion, superstition, etc., of Uncivilized or Semi-civilized Peoples*, a smaller booklet which underwent no substantial revision in Frazer's lifetime while it was used.[7] These *Notes and Queries* and *Questions* served the needs of the 'inquirers' in the remote areas, the periphery. As Stocking commented 'the native was a specimen to be measured, photographed and interviewed' (Stocking 1996: 255). There was, however, a gradual development from the 'inquirer' to the 'observer', the latter not merely taking stock but also trying to

[5] I refer to the works of George Stocking, Jr., in particular his authoritative *After Tylor; British Social Anthropology; 1888-1951.*

[6] See also Thornton 1983.

[7] See Urry, 1993.

interpret. Rivers and the Cambridge School developed the concept of 'intensive work', and, according to Stocking, it was Rivers who first defined the 'public charter' of modern ethnography.[8]

Together with the gradual disappearance of the inquirer, the evolutionary perspective of both Tylor and Frazer came under attack from critics like Marett, who noted in the realm of religion, for example, a psychological substratum of awe, a feeling of the supernatural, which could not be reasoned away. Marett took up the notion of Mana as developed by Codrington, a missionary who had worked in Melanesia, and had also based his thinking on his personal observations.

Attention was gradually oriented to the actual functioning of the cultural elements thanks, to some extent at least, to the specific process of observation itself. This development in British anthropology from inquirer to observer, as far as method is concerned, and from evolutionism to functionalism, as far as the theoretical paradigm is concerned, found its climax in Malinowski, who once and for all established the concept of ethnographic authority. Due to his influence, especially, fieldwork became the epistemological and theory-founding core of the new discipline of anthropology. Through this concept of ethnographic authority, anthropology tried to emancipate itself as an academic discipline taking the natural sciences as the obvious paradigm. Ethnographic authority refers to the authority of the professional fieldworker who builds his theories on the foundations of his own observations. The academic of the metropolis physically left his armchair and took his audience along to the periphery. The ethnographer merged with the man-on-the-spot. And this same ethnographer saw himself as a professional, following a scientific approach in the collection of data through participant observation, thereby dethroning the one time missionary 'man-on-the-spot'. Clifford showed how this ethnographic authority was implicitly validated by means of the author's experience of 'being there'.[9]

In recent years, this image of ethnographic authority has crumbled. Ironically, it was Malinowski himself who, perhaps unsuspectingly, started this deconstruction of ethnographic authority through his diaries that were published in

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[8] Rivers defined 'intensive work' as that 'in which the worker lives for a year or more among a community of perhaps four or five hundred people and studies every detail of their life and culture; in which he comes to know every member of the community personally; in which he is not content with generalized information, but studies every feature of life and custom in concrete detail and in the vernacular language' (Stocking 1996:123).

[9] See especially Clifford 1988. Geertz talks about 'their [anthropologists, HvR] capacity to convince us that what they say is a result of their having actually penetrated (or, if you prefer, been penetrated by) another form of life, of having, one way or another, truly "been there"' (Geertz 1989: 4-5).

1967. These show a person very unlike the archetypal unbiased, neutral and professional observer he claimed to be.

Academics have, gradually, acknowledged the constitutive effects of a context in which the ethnographic material is collected *and* textualised. Ethnographic knowledge has increasingly come to be regarded as perception and as such, the ethnographer's own creation or invention of the 'Other'.[10] An analysis of ethnographic material necessitates analysis of the constituents of the actual process by which this knowledge *about* the 'Other' was acquired *from* the 'Other', in addition to investigating how it eventually shaped the representation *of* the 'Other'.

Ethnography is, increasingly, seen as a continuous interplay between the ethnographer, the observer, the observed, the audience and the resulting text. The position of observer and observed, changes continuously as they interact. The ethnographer reflects continuously on his experiences, and these experiences are dynamic and sometimes contradictory and ambiguous. A text is nothing more than a picture frozen in time, a picture which at first sight, masks different layers of the ethnographer's reflection and representation.

What I intend to do in this article is to offer some elements for a deconstruction of Smith & Dale's ethnographic authority, and to return the ethnography to the context of the transitional period in British anthropology. I will focus more in particular on the part played by religion. At the same time, I want to bring the author Edwin W. Smith, a missionary with a strong anthropological commitment, back to the text of his ethnography. I want to show that the process by which the main author of this ethnography conceptualises the 'Other', remains in a state of flux, which at a given moment solidifies into a final text, *re*presenting an image of the 'Other' that will never be final. As opposed to ethnographic authority, resulting from and based on a prolonged stay among the 'observed', I position ethnography at a specific location in a diachronic development.

In this article, I will focus on the ethnographic writings of a specific missionary. The word 'ethnography' is, of course, strongly associated with 'professional' anthropologists. But, as we saw, missionaries played a major role in the early development of anthropology as an academic discipline. Time and again, anthropologists have used stereotypes when characterizing missionaries: men who merely tried to export and impose a new system of meaning, the Western Christian faith, on an indigenous people, at the expense of the local system of meaning.[11]

The epistemological issues involved in the process of the representation of the 'Other' can be viewed, thanks to missionaries such as Smith and Junod, against the

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[10] See Clifford (ed.) 1986. *Writing Culture* proved to be a landmark in this development.

[11] See e.g. Van der Geest 1987 and 1990, and Bonsen, Marks and Miedema (eds.) 1990.

background of the interaction between different systems of meaning. This interaction is characterised by the processes of dominance and translation. Missionary endeavour may be thought of as a model of intervention, its starting point being a local culture with its own indigenous system of meaning, facing a missionary intervention from a Christian religious system of meaning. Given that cultures and their underlying systems of meaning, are dynamic by their very nature, it is nevertheless appropriate to speak of an intervention of one system of meaning into another at a certain point in its development. This missionary intrusion took shape as a result of both dominance and translation processes.

I define dominance as the process by which the system of meaning of one culture is imposed upon the system of meaning of another culture. Translation can be defined as the process through which the system of meaning of the culture of the 'Other' is translated and interpreted in terms of the dominating system of meaning.

The processes of dominance and translation are intermingled. Translation takes place within the context of dominance, whereas dominance can never escape a certain element of translation. In my opinion, an ethnography written by a missionary is characterised by this complex context of both dominance and translation. As a result of the interaction between the different systems of meaning, these processes of dominance and translation will inevitably be subject to constant change.[12] Clifford offered us a fascinating study of the tension between ethnographer and missionary in his biography of Leenhardt (Clifford 1992). But even Clifford was criticised for not giving due cognisance to the element of dominance (implicit in Leenhardt's relationship with his informants) in the process of translation (Rabinow in Stocking 1983). Now let us turn to the periphery.

'Smith & Dale', birth of an ethnography

Having outlined some epistemological problem areas related to the ethnography and the relationship between missionaries and anthropologists at the beginning of this century, I will now focus on Edwin W. Smith who worked from 1900 - 1915 as a missionary in Northern Rhodesia, now known as Zambia. My own 'fieldwork' was conducted from the point of view of his life and some his writings. Together with Andrew Murray Dale, a magistrate working in Northern Rhodesia at the time, Smith wrote an ethnography on the Ila-speaking peoples. This ethnography, frequently referred to as 'Smith & Dale', became a reference work. In the words of Colson and Gluckman: 'it founded modern anthropological

[12] This context of dominance and translation is, of course, not restricted to missionaries. Based on an analogy between missionaries and anthropologists, it is possible to identify these processes, as also in ethnographies written by professional anthropologists.

research in British Central Africa'.[13] In her introduction to the 2nd edition published in 1968, Elizabeth Colson characterised 'Smith and Dale' as 'one of the great classics of African ethnography' [...] 'one of the basic documents of anthropological literature' (Colson 1968:1).

The ethnography was actually completed in 1915 (but was published only in 1920), immediately after Smith had ended his missionary activities in Africa. Smith is the principal author of the ethnography, as can be inferred from the table of contents. Following this ethnography, Smith also published several works in the field of missionary history in Africa, in addition to what could be labelled 'applied anthropology', such as the famous *The Golden Stool* (1927). Finally, in 1950 he edited *African Ideas of God: A symposium* in which several authors highlighted the concept of God in several African societies from a missionary-theological perspective. Smith wrote a 30-page elaborate and influential introduction to the subject. The observation process which took place during his missionary work in Africa, and the subsequent process of textualisation, resulting ultimately in the ethnography, are likely to have moulded Smith's views of religion, and which he expressed so outspokenly in his later writings.

Biographical notes

Edwin W. Smith was born in 1876 in Aliwal North (Cape Province) in what is now South Africa. His father, John Smith, was a minister in the Primitive Methodist Church in South Africa. Edwin soon returned to England with his parents, and became a missionary in 1898. He first worked as a missionary in Basutoland and in Aliwal North, until in July 1902 he was transferred to Northern Rhodesia, where his first mission post was at Nanzela. During his stay there, he wrote his manual on the Ila language that was published by Oxford University Press in 1906. In 1906/07 he returned to England on home leave, and when he returned to Northern Rhodesia in 1907, he founded a new mission station in Kasenga. In 1915, he returned to England, where he worked for the British and Foreign Bible Society, firstly as a secretary for Italy, and later for Western Europe. In 1922, he became literary superintendent, and in 1932 editorial superintendent. He left the Society in 1939.

Smith was one of the founding fathers of the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures. In 1927 he became a member of the Council of the Royal Anthropological Institute, and from 1934-1935 he served as its President. Smith

[13] Colson and Gluckman (eds.), 1951.

also served as one of the external examiners for Isaac Schapera's Ph.D. thesis and for Monica Hunter's classic *Reaction to Conquest*[14].
From 1939-1943, Smith worked as Visiting Professor at the Hartford Seminary Foundation (Connecticut) and at Fisk University (Tennessee). From 1945 onwards, he was the editor of *Africa* for a period of three years. He died in 1957.

In other words, the Reverend Edwin W. Smith epitomised both the anthropologist and the missionary of his time. It is not without reason that Malinowski, who had a very low opinion of missionaries generally, explicitly named two exceptions: Henri Junod and Edwin W. Smith[15].

In the following section, I will make a contextual and textual analysis of the part of the Ila ethnography that deals with their religion. I want to examine Smith's ethnographic writings and to find out whether it is possible to discern any degree of interaction between his work as a missionary, which can be defined as a specific dimension of his participant observation, and the process of writing, resulting finally in 'Smith & Dale'. When was Smith the ethnographer and when was he the missionary? Is there a contradiction between the two roles? Or is there perhaps an intricate interaction between these two aspects that, finally, constituted Smith's representation or, rather, his construction of reality? In this analysis, Smith's construction of the religion of the Ila will feature prominently. I will contrast part of his ethnographic writing with some of his letters and reports published in *The Herald,* a magazine issued by the Primitive Methodist Missionary Society in the period 1902-1915.

Preface to the ethnography

Prefaces to ethnographies frequently serve as specific locations in which the author presents himself to his audience in a style that reveals elements of his personality, thus providing useful insights when analysing ethnographic texts.[16] I will start my analysis of 'Smith and Dale', therefore, with a close reading of the preface in order to explore what the author tells us about why, for whom, and how he wanted to represent the 'Ila-speaking peoples'. Probably this preface was written by Edwin Smith himself: for in a postscript, he referred to the death of his co-author, Andrew

[14] Information from the Rev. John Young to the author. See also the acknowledgements of Monica Hunter in her *Reaction to Conquest*.
[15] '..missionaries were an enemy, except for Edwin Smith and H.A. Junod, who apparently were more interested in learning about the tribal peoples than in converting them' (Powdermaker, 1966: 43).
[16] As Geertz says: 'Explicit representations of authorial presence tend to be relegated, like other embarrassments, to prefaces, notes, or appendices' (Geertz 1989:16).

Murray Dale, prior to publication. Smith opens by stating his motive for embarking on his ethnographic work.

> Finding ourselves among a people that were almost unknown to the outside world, we threw ourselves into a study of their language and customs, our motive being, not the production of a book of this kind, but simply that we might prosecute our callings as missionary and magistrate to the best advantage. For whether one is to teach or to govern, one's first duty is to understand the people. In the course of the years we found our stock of information accumulating, and in 1909 we determined to collaborate in a book that should record the results of our research. From that time we continued our investigations deliberately with that end in view. From first to last, this book is, then, the result of some thirteen years' first-hand study (Smith & Dale, Preface, ix).

This drive to study and textualise, was closely associated with a particular audience to whom the authors aimed to address their study.

> At the same time we wish to say that we have studied the Ba-ila, not as curious zoological specimens, but as fellow men and women; our interest in them is far from being academic. We have devoted some of our best years to their improvement. We believe them to be a people of great capacity, who with sympathetic, patient, firm guidance may advance very far. And in writing our book we have had our successors in view, whether magistrates or missionaries. [.....] We would say to them: learn to look at the world through the eyes of your people, make their language and ways of thinking as much as possible your own, saturate yourself in their folklore. If your studies in preparation for your present task have had to do with law and theology, let your mind now be given to the people, and study them with an ardour equal at least to that you gave to your professional studies. And withal, do not forget that these Ba-ila are flesh and blood and soul as you and we are. It is to help you and so help the Ba-ila that we have chiefly written this book. (Smith & Dale, Preface, p. xiii) [17]

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[17] This preface to 'Smith and Dale' bears a striking resemblance to the preface to the ethnography written by Junod. Both Smith's and Junod's main motivation was to depict, scientifically, a culture they had learned during their prolonged stay. They wanted to provide information for professional anthropologists, for their successors, colonial magistrates etc., in order to enable those people to better perform their tasks.
'My aim in collecting all this material has been twofold; scientific and practical. First of all scientific. The life of a South African tribe is a collection of biological phenomena which must be described objectively and which are of great interest, representing, as they do, a certain stage of human development. My aim has been to submit the Thonga tribe to such a study.[.....] There

Another major argument for men like Smith and Junod to portray the culture of 'their people', was to preserve the information on the current predicament of those people, prior to their being 'perverted' by the intervention of Western civilisation, or even before their possible extinction.

> They (Ba-Ila, HvR) have asked only to be left alone. It is only now that they are beginning to be influenced by foreign civilisation. We can claim that our account of their life has the advantage of being the description of a people in their wild, raw state. (Smith & Dale: 57)[18]

But Smith and his colleagues had yet another audience in mind when conceptualising and writing the ethnography. It is interesting to note their relationship to science as they themselves conceived it, and more in particular to the developing academic discipline of anthropology. They did not yet see themselves as professional anthropologists, but rather as 'men on the spot'.

> While not professing to be scientifically trained anthropologists, we have written with such experts in mind, and if we have succeeded in giving them any valuable material for their studies we shall be glad. (Smith & Dale, Preface: xiii)[19]

'Smith & Dale' may therefore be situated in the transitional period between the Frazerian armchair anthropologist and the Malinowskian anthropologist-fieldworker. Frazer, apparently, remained the paradigmatic academic audience for whom Smith and Junod wrote:

> In the preparation of that book [The Ila-speaking peoples, HvR] Dale and I, as amateur ethnographers, were very strongly influenced by Sir James Frazer. His little collection of Questions became for us a golden string leading through the maze of African life. After the work was published Sir James invited me to visit him, and I did so frequently. (Smith 1948:7)

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are two classes of men to whom I should like to bring some practical help in their work: the Native Commissioners and the Missionaries' (Junod 1927: 7-8).

[18] See also Junod: 'I aim at being a faithful and impartial ethnographer in the study of customs which still exist but will soon have passed away, but I cannot forget that I am also a missionary' (Junod 1927: 11).

[19] See also Junod: 'Anthropologists try to throw some light on the dark problem of the origin of the psychic life in mankind; may the picture of a South African primitive tribe bring them some valuable information' (Junod 1927: 10).

Junod also took 'as a guide the set of questions prepared by Prof. J. Frazer for people collecting ethnographical material' (Junod 1927:6).

On the other hand, Smith and Junod had already tried to write their ethnographies in a science-like manner. They organised their material into a system of chapters, subheadings, and paragraphs etc., in order to create the image of a systematic, scientific approach.[20] Smith stated that Dr. Rivers and Sir. H.H. Johnston had read parts of the manuscript and gave them suggestions. Smith was also quite explicit with regard to the method he used in observing the Ila people and in writing the ethnography.

> It is only by tactfully leading conversation in the desired direction and not pressing it too far that one succeeds in getting information in this way. We have been assiduous note-takers, not trusting to our memories, and our book is partly the outcome of many hundreds of conversations recorded at the time and carefully collated. Most of what we have written about we have witnessed, and our impressions were noted at once. In some instances where we could not see the ceremonies we were able to induce trustworthy men to dictate us descriptions of them. Neither missionary nor magistrate can afford, as passing travellers sometimes have allowed themselves, to intrude upon the sanctities of native life, and hence there are some things about which we can report only at second hand, but in all such cases we have been careful to get the most reliable evidence. (Smith & Dale, Preface: xi)

Smith also reflected on the difficulties he encountered in acquiring information from the Ila-people.

> The Ba-ila do not readily communicate to a foreigner their ideas and customs; direct interrogation often fails - generally fails, indeed, except where complete confidence has been won beforehand - for they either profess to know nothing or deliberately give misleading answers. (Smith & Dale, Preface: xi)

This approach shows that Smith was developing from a 'classic man-on-the-spot inquirer' to a modern participant observer. In later publications too, he seems to have been acutely aware of the pitfalls of drawing information from the Ila-people[21].

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[20] See also Thornton, 1983.
[21] For instance, in Smith 1950, he elaborates on the danger of what he calls 'reading-in' what is

Smith also worked with a system of informants and he mentioned two of them, a young man called Kayobe, and a son of Sezongo II of Nanzela, 'a very intelligent young man, who, besides writing down notes on customs, collected from the old chiefs and wrote down a history of his father's people' (Smith & Dale: xii). The latter also featured as one of the few converts in the papers Smith wrote for the missionary magazine. Smith and his informants deliberately tried to get information from the old men, the elderly chiefs, in particular Mungalo of Kasenga. Smith mentions that none of his informants mastered the English language. Here we touch upon the question of the influence of converts who are used as informants. The context of dominance and translation is likely to play an important role here. Junod also referred to the fact that he had worked with a limited number of informants who had converted to the then new and intrusive system of meaning:

> The adults in our congregations have been heathen themselves and have practised the rites on which I questioned them. They can describe them better than raw heathens, as they now stand at a certain distance from their old life and can judge of it more independently. Enjoying their full confidence, having learned by long

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not in fact there and 'reading out', what is not indigenous Africa. Smith argued that the reading-out process was not applicable to his own stay with the Ila: 'I believed that (making allowance for unconscious bias) in my intercourse with the old pagans I was listening to genuinely indigenous Africa'.

In one of Smith's contributions to his missionary home front in April 1911, however, he portrayed the Ila in very strong terms as absolute liars: 'These are not a simple, unsophisticated people. They are as deep as the blue sea and as cunning as any London thief. They are adapts at every deceptive art. […] They are champion shirkers. [.....] The Baila would be hard to beat for sound and solid lying. It really seems unnatural to them to speak the truth. They will tell a lie even when it is distinctly to their advantage to be truthful. They will look you straight in the eye and tell the most barefaced lie without a tremor. They will lie when they know that you know they are lying. They will lie in the face of the clearest evidence of their falsehood. [....] After long experience, one is really compelled to treat everyone as a liar until he is proved to be speaking the truth. [....] I have a serious purpose in writing this, I do not aim simply to amuse by an account of our struggles against wicked men. There are many other things of which one cannot write freely, but this will give a glimpse of one side of their life. We have a glorious opportunity here, but unless our friends realise the kind of people we have to deal with the descriptions of our opportunities may give rise to false hopes. I find it difficult to believe that there can be a more immoral people in almost every way'. (microfiche *The Herald* 1905 - (H-2741) V.VI, 1911, no. 1-6).

I assume that his methodological approach as inquirer, literally asking questions, more readily evokes this negative sentiment as he is forced to rely on the information provided by these interrogated. The method of participant observation on the other hand, will induce the ethnographer to rely on his own capabilities, his own senses.

practice how to put questions in order to get impartial answers, I think that their testimony can be considered as scientifically reliable. (Junod 1927:4)[22]

'Smith & Dale' on religion; an 'anthropological' perspective

In 1970 Geoffrey Parrinder, who coined the term 'African Traditional Religion', wrote that 'Edwin Smith also gave a model for African religious thought, regarding it as a pyramid' (Parrinder 1970:85). This pyramidal paradigm is already implicitly evident in the list of contents of 'Smith & Dale':

PART IV

CHAPTER XX

Dynamism

1. The theory
2. Witchcraft

CHAPTER XXI

The Doctrine of **Souls**

1. Death and Funerary Customs
2. The Destination of the Departed
3. Metempsychosis
4. Various Kinds of Ghosts
5. Dreams
6. Spirit Possession
7. Reincarnation
8. The Genius, of Guardian Spirit
9. The Psychology of the Ba-Ila

CHAPTER XXII

The **Divinities**

1. Personal and Family Divinities
2. The Great Mizhimo: Communal Divinities
3. Bulongo

CHAPTER XXIII

The **Supreme Being**: Leza

[22] One of Junod's informants was Tobane, who, according to Junod, 'was a patriot, and when he became a Christian he did his best to bring his brethren to his new faith. When he understood what I wanted, *he at once did his best to satisfy me and sometimes even anticipated my questions* [the italics are mine]' (Junod 1927: 4).

Smith opens Part IV with a treatise on Dynamism, and it is important to note that this was one of his first elaborate and systematic contributions on the subject. We may safely assume that this part was inserted in the text of the ethnography at a later stage, after a period of reading and reflection. In the other parts of the ethnography, Smith still used the word 'magic', whilst in the part dealing with dynamism, he reconsidered his use of this word and opts instead for 'Dynamism':

> In earlier chapters of this book we have used the words magic, magical as convenient expressions for the mysterious elements in life; but we prefer not to use the words in this connection. And that for two reasons. They are ambiguous in meaning, and they appear to convey the sense of something inferior, illicit, bad. Nor for similar reasons do we use that other term so commonly employed in descriptions of African races: Fetishism. We prefer the word Dynamism, because the beliefs and practices we wish to include under it have not necessarily any evil intention, and because it expresses simply what we believe to be the nature of their belief and practice - the belief in, and the practices associated with the belief in hidden, mysterious, super-sensible, pervading energy, powers, potencies, forces. (Smith & Dale, II:80)

In this part, Smith also gave his own definition of religion.[23]

> That the Ba-Ila have such a consciousness of higher powers cannot be questioned by any one with even a superficial knowledge of them. They not only believe in their existence but are quite sure that they have intercourse with them. That is to say, they are religious. (Smith & Dale, II:80)

In Smith's model, there is a logical sequence from dynamism to the *mizhimo* and from there to Leza.

> In other words, we can distinguish traces of development from dynamism to something approaching monotheism. (Smith & Dale, II:80)

It is this element of evolutionary thinking that prompted Elizabeth Colson to comment that: 'The chapters on religion contain too many echoes of Tylor and the

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[23] In my article, *Knowing the African: Edwin W. Smith and the Invention of 'African Traditional Religion'* (included in this thesis), I have tried to trace Smith's conception of religion back to Schleiermacher and to Rudolf Otto, especially, in whose definition we find a strong emphasis on the feeling of awe (Van Rinsum, n.d.). Another source of inspiration for Smith was Codrington's formulation of the concept of 'Mana' (Codrington was also a missionary).

search for the origin of religious ideas [...]' (Colson 1968:4). One may argue that this evolutionary thinking was, to some extent, perhaps induced by their use of Frazer's guidelines.

A major segment of Part IV was devoted to the description of what Smith called 'The Doctrine of the Souls' (pp. 100-164). Here Smith presented successive descriptions of: (1) Death and Funerary Customs, (2) The Destination of the Departed, (3) Metempsychosis, (4) Various Kinds of Ghosts, (5) Dreams, (6) Spirit Possession, (7) Reincarnation, (8) The Genius, or Guardian Spirit, and (9) The Psychology of the Ba-Ila.

The 'Doctrines of the Souls' section is followed by one dealing with the 'Divinities' in which Smith differentiated between (1) Personal and Family Divinities (2) The Great Mizhimo: Communal Divinities, and (3) Bulongo. This is a series in which Smith saw a clear development process:

> We have been mounting through the stages of the Ila hierarchy - genii, divinities, demi-gods, arch-demigod - all spoken of as *mizhimo*, but having an ever-widening scope of action; it remains now to deal with Leza, the Supreme Being, whose sphere is cosmical. (Smith & Dale II:196)

Smith concludes his section on the religious system of the Ila, with a relatively short chapter on Leza, the Supreme Being. He put the Ila themselves as informants upon the stage:

> We have talked with many old men who had not come under the influence of Christian teaching, and will transcribe here the actual words of two of them- both intelligent old chiefs. (Smith & Dale, II:198)

Smith opened this chapter on the Ila-theology as follows: - 'We have been trying to reconstruct for ourselves the theology of the Ba-Ila' (Smith & Dale, II:207) – by analysing the praise-names for Leza as they were used by the Ila. Two, inter-related, elements catch the eye, the first one being Leza's remoteness:

> The mizhimo are near to men: they are of the same nature, know human life from the inside, realise the wants of men; Leza on the other hand, is remote and takes little or no cognisance of the affairs of individuals. (Smith and Dale, II:208)

This concept of the Supreme Being, remote in his abode, is an element, typical of Western Christian conceptualising of African religion and, as such, was strongly criticised by later African scholars of religion and theologians such as Idowu. The second element is the functioning of the *mizhimo* as intermediaries.

> But the Ba-ila do seek to come into touch with. They regard the mizhimo as intermediaries between themselves and Leza. (Smith & Dale, II:208)

As Westerlund notes, this mediumistic theory also fitted into a more general framework of the Christianization of African religions (Westerlund 1993:45-46).

When we consider the composition of Part IV, we may reasonably conclude that the section dealing with the Doctrine of the Souls and the Divinities, is the most comprehensive, not only in quantitative terms but also in terms of ethnographic imagination. Generally speaking, the ethnography contains many photographic images, mostly taken by Smith himself. It is as if he wanted to say to his audience that these pictures testified his presence and thereby validated his representation of the Ila. It is interesting to note, however, that in contrast to the middle section, the sections dealing with Dynamism and Leza contain no photographic material at all. This middle section reveals the traces of the inquirer/observer Smith more clearly, although his theoretical pyramidal model of the development from dynamism to spiritism and to theism was already present in it, albeit in an embryonic form. In his later writings, Smith refined this model by giving more space to dynamism on the one hand, and to theism in particular, on the other.

Smith, Ethnographer and Missionary

As I have stated before, Smith was speaking very much as an ethnographer especially in the middle of Part IV especially, in which he dealt with the *mizhimo*. An important role is played by Shimunenga, the communal God of Kasenga. At the same time, however, Smith was working as a missionary in Northern Rhodesia. I have already referred to the dual structure of dominance and translation in the writings of missionaries exploring the religious systems of the ‘Other’. There is also evidence of this dual structure in Smith’s writings when one weighs his ethnographic texts against the contributions he wrote for his missionary home front. As we have seen, Smith wrote his ethnography for a particular audience, which included anthropologists in the metropolis, and it was very different from his missionary audience.

Part of Smith's contribution for the home front was his correspondence with the missionary authorities in London, in which two main issues were constantly present. In the first place, there was the consensus on the importance of the colonial enterprise. The envisaged construction of a railway from Cape Town to Cairo, apparently, served as a metaphor for an advancing civilisation. Smith once described an evening with Cecil Rhodes as follows:

> One dominant passion ruled his [Cecil Rhodes', HvR] life -- a passion to extend British rule in Africa. He believed it to be for the highest interests of mankind that the frontiers of freedom and justice under the Union Jack should be flung as wide as possible: and in this he had my warmest sympathies.[24]

At the same time, however, Smith perceived the other, negative, side of the encroachment of so-called civilisation onto the African continent:

> Contact with civilization will not entirely benefit the people. We are glad that the government seems to be determined to keep liquor from the natives, but the presence of many undesirable characters in the country cannot have a good effect. The mines, railway and towns will attract many of our young men for work, and they will be often withdrawn from our influence.[25]

Apart from this vision of the necessity of bringing civilisation to Africa, which Smith shared with Rhodes, the correspondence with the authorities in England was constantly dominated by financial affairs. The core of the discussion was the perception of the authorities that the mission in Central Africa was too costly. More than once, a comparison was drawn with the mission posts in West Africa that yielded more, and with less financial input. In 1910, the missionary Secretary, Arthur Guttrey, sent a letter on the subject to the missionaries in Central Africa, including Smith. This letter triggered very strong reactions from the missionaries. Smith almost decided to resign both because of the letter itself, and because of the apparent lack of understanding of their difficult situation. I mention this element in the correspondence because it obviously determined the atmosphere for the working conditions of the missionaries. It might have even influenced Smith's perception, and thereby his representation of the Ila. According to Smith, missionary labour was costly but should not be looked upon solely in terms of

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[24] Microfiche H-2723 Box no. 610 (3) Africa Papers - Edwin W. Smith, 1924.
[25] Microfiche no 77, *The Herald* 1905 - (H-2741) V.II. 1906 (April), no. 1-6, p. 60.

cost-effectiveness. More than once, he tried to convince his home front that the high costs of the mission in Central Africa corresponded to the Ila's high level of 'savageness'. This leads us automatically to the interesting problem area surrounding Smith's perception and textualisation of the Ila, from his missionary point of view. For this I refer to Smith's contributions in the missionary magazine of the Primitive Methodist Missionary Society (until 1905 entitled the *The Records of Missionary Work* and after 1905 *The Herald of the Primitive Missionary Society*). Is it possible to identify differences in Smith's perception of the Ila in the missionary magazine from those in his ethnographic writings? And if so, how do they relate to each other?

Smith started his missionary work in Nanzela in 1902, and continued to work there until 1907, when he went on home leave to England. He returned to Africa, and to a new mission post in the Kasenga district in 1909. He was to stay there until 1915 before returning once again to England. After 1915, and for health reasons, he made only short visits to Africa.

Although the material is scarce, we can detect different perspectives in his missionary contributions that can be associated with his different mission posts. His stay in England may be regarded as a long interval, in which Smith was able to reflect on his missionary work. In his early contributions and those of his fellow-missionaries such as Chapman, Smith presents a gloomy picture of the Ila. There are some striking examples, and the key word is 'darkness', which stood in sharp contrast to the 'light' brought by the missionaries.

> What with witchcraft, infanticide, slave-trading, fighting, murdering, trials by ordeal - it would be difficult to imagine a more horrible state of affairs.[26]

In 1903, Smith's colleague, Rev. Baldwin, spoke at the Annual Conference of the Primitive Methodist Missionary Society about the Mashukulumbwe, as the Ila were called:

> In Mashukulumbweland there are no large towns, no stone buildings, no roads, no public conveyances, no shops, no mills, no streets. There is not one two-storied building in the whole country, and no house is now standing which was built twenty years ago. There were no landlords, no rents, and no rates, but occupation carries with it ownership. Everything in nature is free. The country is sombre. The beauty of the people is found in their disfigurement. Flowers are never cultivated, and never

[26] Microfiche no 77, *The Herald* 1905 - (H-2741) V.II. 1906 (April), no. 1-6, p. 46.

> appreciated. Human life has little value. Murders create no surprise, but are taken as ordinary events of daily life. The natives have no comfort in life. They live in darkness and degradation unutterable. They have a superstition which gives them no hope and imparts no joy. They know nothing of the path of life. As missionaries the agents of Primitive Methodism have no auxiliaries. They have to touch every part of their life. The missionaries have to inculcate cleanliness. No one can go into a native hut and come out again unattended. The missionaries have to teach industry. Men are taught to sew on our mission. The missionaries have to teach the natives by pictures. After that they pass on to reading and singing, and then comes the great task of leading the African to Christ.[27]

This early period was characterised by the negation of a religious system of the 'Other'. More than once, Smith described the Ila as thoroughly indifferent to things spiritual:

> Ten years ago not a soul at Nanzela had heard the Gospel. They had not the slightest notice of a Supreme Being, paid no worship to Him, and did not allow Him any influence over their lives. At first it was, of course, impossible to proclaim the Gospel, for the language was not known. Preaching was commenced through interpreters, but it must have been long before any correct idea of Christianity took hold of the people. Now for years the Gospel has been preached in the language of the people themselves. Correct ideas have spread abroad, in very many cases, the obligations of the Gospel are known and approved, but rejected. Many are merely indifferent.[28]

In *The Records* of 1903, Smith recalled a service he had held in one of the villages near his mission post:

> A downright heathen congregation: only one professing Christian in the lot and that is Mooba whom we brought from Nanzela. How to touch their hearts is the problem: to put the truth in such simple and striking form that they will understand and retain it: to arouse them from their awful apathy to spiritual things and put a desire for something better within them - who is sufficient for these things? [....]
>
> In the afternoon Mr. Chapman and I take our homeward ways. I ask Mooba whether he thinks the people have understood today and he replies "Yes, they understood well". I asked some of them and they are being troubled by their consciences. They

[27] Microfiche no. 71, *The Records* 1893- (H-2741) V.1903 p.119.

[28] Microfiche no 77, *The Herald* 1905 - (H-2741) V.II. 1906 (April), no. 1-6, p.59.

> say they see they are altogether lost and want help and they grieve. Well, that may mean much or it may mean nothing: it generally means nothing, merely words, words, words.[29]

In 'A Letter from Nanzela', published in *The Records* in 1903, Smith looked back to his first coming to Nanzela:

> Meanwhile, we do not hide from ourselves, and have no desire to hide from you the real position of affairs and the difficulties awaiting us. We represent neither to ourselves nor to you, that this is a people crying out for the Gospel. A missionary who once travelled about the Zambesi said: "I have come across millions of men who need but to hear our Lord's words and deeds to become so many good and happy Christians!" Would that it were so, but it is not. We have found neither the millions of men nor any great willingness to become good and happy Christians. The bulk of the people are simply indifferent.[30]

It was not only the indifference of the Ila that struck Smith in this period; there were times when he expressed his ideas about the Ila in extremely negative terms:

> [...] but I fear some effects are likely to be more permanent amid all this letting loose of the worst passions of heathenism. I fear some of our Catechumens have fallen away. Heathenism at any time is the very vilest of all the vile things on earth. Do not talk of "noble savages", and "the simple child-like African"; at such times as these, passions are allowed to run wild, with fearful results. The fruit of years of patient toil is swept away, and one is left saddened and disheartened.[31]

How then can we interpret Smith's negative representation of the Ila? We must not forget that Smith came to the Ila as a stranger. There is a photograph showing the Smith family in a covered wagon, drawn by six pairs of oxen on their way to the Ila territory in 1902. All they knew was that the Ila, the Mashukulumbwe as they were called at that time, were reputed to a be savage and vicious people. Referring to Eric Cohen's article 'The Missionary as Stranger', we can safely assume that Smith was very much a stranger at two levels in his first mission post.[32] The first level was that of *cognitive strangeness*, defined by Cohen as 'an

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[29] Microfiche no. 71, *The Records* 1893- (H-2741) V.1903 (May) p.135, 138.
[30] Microfiche no. 72, *The Records*. 1893- (H-2741) V.1903 (October) p.189-190.
[31] Microfiche no. 73, *The Records*. 1893- (H-2741) V.1904 (April) p.66.
[32] Cohen 1990. In an article 'Nanzela: Some Personal Experiences in Central Africa' written by Edwin W. Smith, and published in the *Centenary Series* No. 12, Smith recalled his first

absence of understanding on the part of the stranger of the world view, the categories, thought patterns, values, norms and customary meanings prevalent in the host environment (Cohen 1990: 338). The second level was that of *normative strangeness*, defined by Cohen as an absence of identification with, or internalisation of the values, norms and customary meanings prevalent in the host environment (Cohen 1990: 338).

Cohen suggested that in many cases (e.g. with missionaries) there was a development in terms of a partial transition: 'namely, a successful cognitive transition, accompanied by an absence of a normative transition'. Cohen called this pattern 'interpretative, since those who practice it, usually seek to understand the host environment, but interpret the significance of what they understood in terms of normative relevances, derived from their own culture of origin, or from their specific professional subculture, and not from that of their host' (Cohen 1990: 338). This interpretative pattern comes close to what Clifford has labelled 'an unpublicized other conversion process' when writing about Leenhardt, a missionary with a strong anthropological bent (Clifford 1980: 2).

Smith's first period amongst the Ila can be characterised in terms of both cognitive and normative strangeness, and it undoubtedly led to his somewhat negative portrayal of the Ila people. This first period came to an end in 1907 when the Smith family returned to England on leave. Smith remained in England until 1909 when he returned to Africa, again to open a new mission station, this time in Kasenga. It would not be unreasonable to interpret his leave in England as a period of reflection on his observations in Nanzela, and as a period he used to catch up on the latest developments in the theories surrounding the study of religion and anthropology.

The Kasenga period, on the other hand, showed a Smith developing a cognitive familiarity out of a cognitive strangeness, but at the same time maintaining the element of normative strangeness. Increasingly, Smith came to appreciate the religious system of the 'Other', and this appreciation became embedded in a more positively coloured ethnographic description of the 'Other'. The Ila were no longer perceived as merely the opposite of the Western civilised person. The starting point of his Kasenga period was different from his start in Nanzela. He returned to Africa 'sadder and wiser', and with probably fewer expectations:

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experiences: 'Everything was strange to us'. (H-2723 Box no. 610 (3) Africa Papers-Edwin W. Smith, 1924).

> I go back to Africa without any illusions. A raw recruit may cherish rosy romanticisms, but the old campaigner has long ago parted from them. I know the heart-breaking indifference to higher things that we will find at Kasenga.[33]

During his Kasenga-period, Smith contributed relatively little to *The Herald*. From what he did write, however, it would be safe to conclude that Smith perceived his mission-labours in Kasenga essentially as a struggle between Shimunenga, the communal god in Kasenga, and Jesus Christ:

> It was necessary early to take stock of the religious state of the Kasenga people, and I was not long in discovering that the whole social life of the people was bound up in their worship of their ancestral spirit, Shimunenga, whose sacred grove stands in the midst of the villages; and it was not difficult to see that the struggle was to be between Shimunenga and Christ. All the old - much of it good, but most of it bad and some of it loathsome in the extreme - is with Shimunenga; the light of the morning rests upon the head of Christ. The issue has been joined. My aim was, not only to persuade individuals to embrace Christianity but also to turn the allegiance of the community as a whole. I wished to build a large and handsome church directly confronting that sacred grove, a church that should stand as a daily witness to the better things. And I wanted to see the day dawn upon which the people would themselves hew down that grove and leave the Church standing alone, a symbol of victory.[34]

This is an important, and even decisive, quotation because it contains Smith's suggestion that an interaction between the two religious systems did develop. Shimunenga was the communal god in the Ila pantheon who ruled the social life of the inhabitants of the Ila district to a great extent. Smith lived in this area for about five years, and during his interaction with the people, he undoubtedly observed the importance of this communal god. The quotation also shows that Smith had developed a positive appreciation of various elements of this religious system, while maintaining his overall negative normative perspective. In 1913, this interaction led to an important and meaningful event, i.e. the appearance of the prophet Mupumani. I shall elaborate on this event as a case study of the interaction between two religious systems.

Another case, that of the Lubambo ritual, will be used as an illustration of the dual qualities of missionary and ethnographer inherent in Smith the man. In

[33] Microfiche no 83, *The Herald* 1905 - (H-2741) V. V, 1909 (May), p.77.
[34] Microfiche no. 97, *The Herald* 1905 - (H-2741) V. 1915 (June), p. 267.

employing these cases, my purpose has been to argue that Smith developed the model, as described by Cohen, of an interpretative pattern of cognitive transition while maintaining a normative strangeness. Although based on sparse material, I want to argue that the 'Smith & Dale' ethnography was nothing more than a specific outcome of a specific location in the development of this interpretative pattern. Smith started his work in Nanzela from the point of view of negating of the 'Other', but went on to gradually develop a line of thought through which he might, nonetheless, be able to incorporate the 'Other' into his own religious system; the Ila were to become part of a Western system of hegemony, and also part of the field of religion.

Cognitive familiarity, in particular on the Shimunenga worship and the Lubambo ritual, determined the ethnographical texts, which Smith produced in his Kasenga period; normative strangeness prevailed in his contributions on them to the missionary magazines. The two, however, were related to each other, because the communal god Shimunenga was also part of the Lubambo ritual.

Two Cases

Case I: Smith and the Lubambo-ritual

The first case deals with a certain Ila ritual, known as the Lubambo. I found two descriptions of this ritual by the same author, Edwin Smith no less. He gave an ethnographic picture of the Lubambo in Smith & Dale, and he also informed his missionary audience of this same ritual in one of his contributions to *The Herald*. Let us first take the text of the ethnography (Smith & Dale II: 67-69):

> Lubambo
>
> In addition to the forms of marriage already described, there is a kind of cicisbeism [the institution of courting married women, HvR] named *Lubambo*, which is really a species of polyandry. This is a recognised institution and one of those things that the Ba-ila very strongly hold to and very much resent any deprecation of. It differs from an ordinary system of paramours, in that there is a public ceremony, so that everybody knows of it, even the woman's husband. He cannot throw stones at his wife because he does the same. We have seen this public ceremony. One year we were present at the great annual gathering in honour of Shimunenga at Mala. There were hundreds of people present, all dressed in their best, singing and dancing around the grove sacred to the *muzhimo*. Then there was a lull, and we saw a procession of men approaching; all of them in the extremity of Ba-ila finery. One of them was leading a young ox. The drums now resumed; and another procession

came forward, of women dressed finely. In the centre was one woman, conspicuous by her extra fine appearance: freshly shaven and anointed, and wearing polished bangles and a new *lechwe* skin. The two parties met, and the man formally presented the woman with the ox and received a spear in turn. Then they separated, and singing and dancing were resumed by the whole multitude. What it meant was that these two had already agreed in private and now signified the fact publicly that they were lovers. At a feast, they, leaving their spouses, become partners and drink and sleep together. [.....] This is not a temporary arrangement simply for the feast, but continues as long as they desire, the man and woman paying each other visits at intervals. No Mwila male or female lacks these lovers. The system is called *Lubambo* ("an arranged thing"), from *kubamba*, to arrange. The paramour is called *Umambakwe*.

The second text is taken from *The Herald of the Primitive Methodist Missionary Society*, June 1910:

Some Baila characteristics by Edwin Smith
The Baila are remarkably religious in their way. I have learnt much of their religious beliefs and customs since coming here. In the centre of the Mala villages is a great thicket into which nobody penetrates; it is the chief abode of their ancestral spirit, Shimunenga. He has other abodes. There is a great fig tree a few yards behind our station that is held sacred as his abode, and there are other similar trees in the district. I am told that Shimunenga pays visits to each of these places in turn, but the thicket, I have named, is where he mostly resides. And around that thicket clusters what tribal life the people of the district have. Shimunenga was their great chief long, long ago, how long I cannot yet determine. He is said to have been a very great chief; he certainly made a deep impression upon the people. In answering questions about their tribal history, the old men get back to him and cannot go beyond. Shimunenga descended, that is all I have got as yet. Now he is their "muzhimo," their ancestral spirit. He stands apart from other deceased chiefs. They are all at some time reborn on earth, he never. And in their time of need they go to him at the thicket with their offerings and prayers.
I was present one day recently at a ceremony when they were praying for rain. I was greatly interested and not a little disappointed. In the first village I came to, the women were busy decorating themselves in all their scanty finery. It was to be the women's day, the men were to have their turn on the morrow. Presently all the paths from the various villages converging on the sacred thicket were thronged with a great crowd of women, all wending their way thither, singing and clapping their

> hands. Each song was musical in its way, but when half a score companies were singing a different song they became discordant. The men took no part beyond acting as masters of ceremony, directing the processions. Round about the thicket are maize fields and into them the women disappeared almost from our sight as we stood on the path. There they remained for some time, singing with all their might, and keeping up an incessant clapping. Presently a party of men appeared leading a young ox, and made their way to the women. Here, I thought, is a sacrifice about to be offered, but the nature of the ceremony soon dawned upon me. It is a nauseous thing at any time, but at that moment it seemed to be singularly incongruous. It was the ceremony of 'lubambo'. The ox was taken by the man and presented to a woman. She separated herself from the crowd and accepted the ox, and presently she and the other women came forward and she presented the man with a new spear. The men went away smiling with pleasure, and the singing recommenced. What it meant is that these two people, both married lawfully to their own spouses, were now publicly recognised as lovers. And that in the middle of a religious ceremony. I strained my ears to catch the words of their songs, but in vain. Here said I to myself again, is a means of learning some of their religious ideas, if only I can get the words of the songs. I appealed to the men standing around us, but could get no information. "Its only their song," they said. Afterwards I did get several down in writing, but I could make little of them, the words were so archaic or unusual. When ultimately I got the meaning I recoiled in horror. The lowest of English music-hall songs would be sweet and innocuous in comparison. Such unmitigated filth I never heard, and that sung publicly by women, on a religious occasion.[......] Thus while they may be religious, it is a religion devoid of high moral content. And yet not so utterly devoid as I have sometimes thought. We live and learn, and there is yet a very great deal about these people that we have not yet found out.[35]

In the first description of the Lubambo ritual taken from the ethnography, Smith attempted to give a concise presentation written in an ostensibly scientific, detached, manner. It avoided normative thinking on the part of the ethnographer, and used the idiom of the anthropologist. It classified the Lubambo as a form of polyandry. Smith emphasised that he was present during this ritual, and he now offered his audience the opportunity of watching, of 'being there'. In another part of the ethnography, he also referred to the performance of this ritual. Again, he implied the objectivity of the observer when he referred to notes he had made after having been present at the festival during which this ritual was performed.

[35] Microfiche no. 85, *The Herald* 1905 - (H-2741) V. 1910 (June), p. 91.

The second text, taken from the missionary magazine and clearly written for a different audience, adopted a different perspective. This quotation shows that Smith was developing his particular interpretative pattern for conceptualising this ritual. The word ‘interested’ indicated his cognitive familiarity, and his position as an ethnographer, whereas the text referred in general to his normative thinking, in line with his own religious and moral norms. Because of his audience, this element of normative strangeness increasingly dominated the text.

Smith’s negative perspective on the ritual was intensified by the fact that it was explicitly part of the religious system of the Ila: ‘Thus while they may be religious, it is a religion devoid of high moral content’. In the ethnography, Smith defined the position of the ceremony of the Lubambo in the religious festival as ‘very incongruous’ (Smith & Dale II, 190), and replaced the ‘unmitigated filth’ by ‘songs of the women [...], mostly phallic in character’ (Smith & Dale II, 191).

Case II Shimunenga and the prophet Mupumani

The second case was more closely related to the interaction between the two religious systems. It showed that this interaction affected the functioning of both systems.

In *The Herald* of September 1913, Smith informed his audience about the activities of prophets in the Kasenga area.

> These prophets have a very important part to play in the life of the Baila. They are swayed more by these revelations from the unseen, true or false, than by anything else.
> Sometimes the message is trivial or even ridiculous; sometimes it may have disastrous consequences if followed to its extremity; at other times the message is distinctly good, and if only obeyed would tell for progress.[36]

Smith differentiated between ‘visionary’ prophets, who claimed they had temporarily left their bodies and visited other worlds; and ‘mediumistic’ prophets, through whom, it was believed, a spirit communicated with the living during spirit possession rituals.

In June 1913, a prophet called Mupumani was said to be living in Nanzela, and Smith’s colleague, Price, wrote about him in an article published in *The Herald* of January 1914. Mupumani, a leper, fell into the first category as defined by Smith. Mupumani referred to a visit to the supernatural world where he had met Mulengashika, the Founder of Custom, a name applied to God. He ordered

[36] Microfiche no. 92, *The Herald* 1905 - (H-2741) V.VI, 1913 (September), p. 469.

Mupumani to bring a message to his people. Among other things, the people should discontinue the mourning ritual which involved the slaying of a large number of cattle, and they should also *Ku Bomba*: they should humble themselves. Price noted that many believed the message because it resembled the one the missionaries had been telling them for years. Mupumani even sent visitors to Price, saluting him by raising their hands straight above their heads with the words *Twa bomba*: we are humble. In other words, they treated Price as Mupumani's fellow prophet.

During one of his travels in the area, a headman from Mala in the Kasenga-district, Mungaba, learnt about Mupumani and his message. This man Mungaba apparently ridiculed Mupumani. Then, when one of his men died under mysterious circumstances, the cause was revealed by a local person in Mala who fell into a trance:

> When challenged the spirit announced himself to be no one less than Shimunenga, the founder of the Kasenga community, the ancestor whose ancient grove stands in the midst of the territory where he is worshipped with great ceremony at certain times. Shimunenga! Evidently something important is coming! Bend low and catch the words as they fall in a low tone from the medium. This is the substance of what he said: Shimunenga had just come from God, was angry at the lightness with which the message of the Nanzela prophet had been received by Mungaba and others and who had in consequence slain the people I have mentioned. He blamed severely those people in the community who had made mock of the missionary's preaching, who had said it was all lies. In future let them pay heed to the preaching, and on Sunday cease from work and attend the service. God's law as proclaimed by the missionary was good and true and unless obeyed would mean their destruction.... [37]

This message caused a sensation in the community:

> Here was the great Shimunenga, the founder of all those tribal institutions which they had regarded as being inimical to the Gospel vouching for the truth of the missionary's message. They had listened to him politely but without any intention of accepting his message, for they had all along been fearful that Shimunenga would be angry with them and refuse to grant them the blessings of his protection. And now Shimunenga had told them to listen and obey.[38]

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[37] Microfiche no. 91, *The Herald* 1905 - (H-2741) V.VI, 1913 (September), p.469-470.
[38] Microfiche no. 91, *The Herald* 1905 - (H-2741) V.VI, 1913 (September), p.470.

Smith organised a service the following Sunday, and much to his surprise no less than 700 people came to attend.

> It was a fine sight. Seven hundred as absolute heathen as you will find in Africa. There is one stranger with a soldier's red coat, but no other sign of civilization.[....] And all the time I am racking my brains to find a subject suitable for the occasion. The simple little address I had prepared was evidently not the thing: what could I say to such a crowd? It came at last. Let me try, to get this mob of savages to understand the mystery of the Cross.[39]

Smith referred to the message given by Mupumani himself:

> I reminded them of the saying of the Nanzela prophet: of the *Kankudi ka buloa* (the little calabash of blood) in the hand of God, which if he broke it would mean the destruction of men, and of the one who restrained Him out of love for men. Their own idea of a Saviour! As I went on to call to repentance and conversion; there was a bit of a commotion. The head chief called: Yes we will repent; and others took up the cry. I waited for silence and then said I should put them to a test. If really they wanted to turn round, let them show their earnestness by building a Church in which we could worship. On this there was quite a hubbub. I went on to picture the churches in our own land, the centres of the social and national life, where we meet for prayer to ask God's blessing on all our doings. But I never finished the picture. They interrupted me. "It is good, good! Fat news! Let us build!".[40]

After the service Mungaila, one of the chiefs in Kasenga, gave Smith a bracelet made of snakeskin and filled with medicine which would protect him. Smith accepted the gift:

> I did not spoil the gift by any ill-timed rebuke for believing in such silly things, but simply slipped it on to my wrist and thanked him warmly.[41]

It must have been an extraordinary experience for Smith. The following quotation gives clear evidence of the way Smith interpreted and evaluated the events.

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[39] Microfiche no. 91, *The Herald* 1905 - (H-2741) V.VI, 1913 (September), p.470.
[40] Microfiche no. 91, *The Herald* 1905 - (H-2741) V.VI, 1913 (September), p.471.
[41] Microfiche no. 91, *The Herald* 1905 - (H-2741) V.VI, 1913 (September), p.471.

> But to have a whole crowd of Mala people - the hardest, most intractable, in the whole country - moved by emotion like this is something we never dreamed of seeing. […] I am not one of those who put aside all these things as merely superstition. Laugh or not, as you please, but I see no reason why Shimunenga should not send a message to his people through a prophet. I believe that God has never left Himself without a witness anywhere, and that even these people amid all their darkness yet get a touch of His hand. Has this been really a gleam from the unseen world? Well, whether it is or not, the people take it as such. If we take it on a lower level and talk of the lowering of the threshold of consciousness in the prophet, the uprush of the subliminal, etc.,etc., even so the incident is full of encouragement. For at the least what it means is that the Gospel is permeating the community, and reaching even that class which commonly is most inimical: those concerned most in the upholding of the old course of things: the prophets and chiefs.
>
> We have laboured, we have preached, we have prayed for four years. And all the time there has been the knowledge that our word was something alien, foreign, outside of their tribal consciousness, an exotic thing, not something they regarded as part and parcel of their life. Now of a sudden the door flies open and we are in the hidden chamber: we have to this extent got there. Our message is taken under the aegis of all they regard most holy. And, as a sign of the new state of things, the chiefs have selected as the site of the proposed Church the most sacred spot in the district.[42]

Unfortunately, Smith had to leave Kasenga immediately after these events, in order to await the arrival of a new missionary in Nambala. In the editorial of *The Herald* of December it was noted:

> On the arrival of the Rev. J.A. Kerswell at Nambala, the Rev. E.W. Smith has returned to Kasenga, where he is anxious to conserve the results of the remarkable spiritual awakening, an account of which appeared in a recent number of the Herald.[43]

However, in 1914 Mupumani's activities soon came to an end when he was imprisoned by the Native Commissioner. The effects of the prophet's message regarding the mission activities in Nanzela and Kasenga also proved to be short-lived. In his evaluation of the Kasenga period, published in *The Herald* of June 1915, Smith noted with an apparent undertone of disappointment:

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[42] Microfiche no. 91, *The Herald* 1905 - (H-2741) V.VI, 1913 (September), p.471-472.
[43] Microfiche no. 92, *The Herald* 1905 - (H-2741) V.VI, 1913 (December), p.517.

> I wished to build a large and handsome church directly confronting that sacred grove, a church that should stand as a daily witness to the better things. And I wanted to see the day dawn upon which the people would themselves hew down that grove and leave the Church standing alone, a symbol of victory. But this plan was frustrated. Those interested in the old regime have fought hard for their god and for the present Shimunenga seems to have won. [....] We came with high hopes; they have not been realised in their entirety, but we rejoice that at least there has been established in this dark spot the foundations of what will yet become a great Christian centre, - a fountain of light and salvation.[44]

This case of Mupumani and the spirit medium in Kasenga, clearly displays a growing and fascinating interplay between two religious systems. Smith was, apparently, actively involved as one of the players in this exchange, and yet, it also sheds further light on Smith's own theology in that he appears to bring Shimunenga within his own religious system:

> Laugh or not, as you please, but I see no reason why Shimunenga should not send a message to his people through a prophet. I believe that God has never left Himself without a witness anywhere, and that even these people amid all their darkness yet get a touch of His hand.[45]

The 'religious Other' was no longer conceptualised as the antipode of the Western Christian, but had been brought into the domain of the governing system, with the help of his own prophets and spirits!

Representation and Hegemony

In an article that will be published shortly[46], I try to demonstrate that Edwin W. Smith deserves to be numbered among the leading pioneers in the development of the missionary discourse of African Traditional Religion. The nucleus of this discourse is the concept of a pyramidal religious system with God, the Supreme Being, the High God, at the top, the spirits in the middle, and dynamism at the base. One of the first texts in which Smith developed this concept was the 'Smith & Dale' ethnography, which was based on Smith's own missionary experience in

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[44] Microfiche no. 97, *The Herald* 1905 - (H-2741) V.VIII, 1915 (June), p. 269.
[45] Microfiche no. 91, *The Herald* 1905 - (H-2741) V.VI, 1913 (September), p.471.
[46] Cf. above, Ch. 2.

Africa. Through this ethnography, Smith tried to represent the 'Other' to his audiences.

In this article, I have tried to shed light on some of the elements of the process of the development of both the ethnography and its principal author. I have tried to 'problematise', to call into question, the notion of the ethnography as a 'true representation'. What I did not do, was to try to unmask the representation as false. The 'Smith & Dale' ethnography can be seen to contain a set of what Clifford called 'partial truths' (Clifford 1986). However, these partial truths did, to some extent, determine the direction of future conceptualising of African Traditional Religion, particularly by theologians rooted in liberal theology and, as such, they are an important constituent of the modern discourse on 'African Traditional Religion'.

One subset of texts focused on the religious system of the Ila. This part was obviously written by an author who had been through a development process himself from being a stranger at all levels to a 'receptive observer'. This part exhibited specific moments in this process of the author's reflection on 'the religious Other'. The part that dealt with dynamism was clearly written in a later phase and bore all the hallmarks of thorough reflection and reading on the subject. The part dealing with the spirits, on the other hand, was characterised by a more descriptive style, because Smith was addressing a reading audience of professional anthropologists in the metropolis, for whom missionaries like himself were to collect ethnographic data. This part was written in a detached style. Here, the 'Other' is a specimen to be measured.....

I have tried to crystallise the problem of the ethnography as a true representation, into two cases. In the first case, I presented two different descriptions of one ritual by one writer, for different audiences, and for different purposes. It would still be legitimate to call both descriptions ethnographic texts. The text written in *The Herald* for Smith's missionary audience, is more honest and revealing. We are able to infer the normative position of the author from the text itself, in which the author seems to introduce us to 'this strange Other'. Normative strangeness obviously dominated the text and was highlighted by pointing to the fact that a ritual, morally unacceptable to the author, related strongly to the Ila's own religious system. In the text describing the ritual in the ethnography, it seems as if the author with his own normative substance, had tried to forcibly remove himself from the scene. It seems that in doing so the author wanted to gain the approval of the developing circle of professional anthropologists in Europe and the US.

The second case gives some indication of the development of the author's thinking; he came in as a stranger but gradually developed a positive appreciation of the 'Other', and he wanted to translate this appreciation into an ethnographic account. On the one hand, the ethnography is the result of a specific moment in this development, which inevitably brings the concept of the representation into question. After all, it was the author who determined the process of textualisation, not the observed. On the other hand, this ethnography as a whole cannot be pinned down to one particular moment only. This would wrongly imply a rational, linear, development in Smith's intellectual growth. This specific location in a development process contains different layers of thinking, conceptualising, and intellectual growth. 'Smith & Dale' also represents the authors' different layers of reflection. Smith being the main author, it is possible to draw lines from different parts of his personal development to different parts of the ethnography. This automatically brings us to the conclusion that if an ethnography such as 'Smith & Dale' had been written in a later phase of the main author's development, it would have had a different content, thereby questioning the whole concept of ethnographic authority.

Smith's pattern of interpretation developed gradually, in part because he was no longer an inexperienced pioneer, a total stranger at the frontier of civilisation in his Kasenga period. He had, in the meantime, developed a receptive attitude which enabled him to bring the 'Other', who was not only a 'savage' but also a religious human being, into his own system, a system of Western hegemony which needed to be developed within the framework of the whole colonial enterprise.[47] Smith needed to master the 'Other' in texts. And this hegemony was further strengthened by the activities of professional anthropologists, colonial administrators and missionaries, the audiences for whom Smith and Dale wrote their ethnography.

[47] I also refer to the fascinating study *Savage Systems* on 'frontier religion' in Southern Africa, by David Chidester (1996). In this book, Chidester formulated his '"frontier hypothesis" of comparative religion: when a frontier opens, the enemy has no religion, but when the frontier closes, and hegemony has been established, a dominated, subjected people are discovered to have a religion that can be inventoried and analyzed' (Chidester 1996: 69).

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Honest to Jok[1]

Okot p'Bitek and De-Hellenising God

> African peoples may describe their deities as "strong" but not "omnipotent"; "wise", not "omniscient"; "old", not "eternal", "great", not "omnipresent". The Greek metaphysical terms are meaningless in African thinking. Like Danquah, Mbiti, Idowu, Busia, Abraham, Kenyatta, Senghor and the missionaries, modern Western Christian anthropologists are *intellectual smugglers* [italics are mine]. They are busy introducing Greek metaphysical conceptions into African religious thought. The African deities of the books, clothed with the attributes of the Christian God are, in the main, creations of the students of African religions. They are all beyond recognition to the ordinary Africans in the countryside. (Okot p'Bitek 1971a: 88)

African Religions in Western Scholarship

This vehement indictment was launched in 1971 in *African Religions in Western Scholarship*[2] by the renowned Ugandan poet, author, politician and anthropologist Okot p'Bitek (1931-1982), who is known all across the globe for his literary work, particularly the *Song of Lawino.*[3]

Okot p'Bitek's biting words targetted Western missionaries in Africa, the African nationalists of *Uhuru*, the recently attained independence, and Western, especially Christian, anthropologists. More than anyone else, his wrath was aimed at Edward Evans-Pritchard[4] and Godfrey Lienhardt. Okot reproached the representatives of these three categories for distorting reality in general, and more specifically for distorting the reality of African religion. Okot was particularly irate about the 'Hellenising' of the African gods, a term he used for the process that

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[1] An earlier (Dutch) version of this paper was published in *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift*, 54, 4 (October 2000): 273-294. I am grateful for permission to publish this revised English version here.

[2] Okot p'Bitek, *African Religions in Western Scholarship* (1971) Nairobi, etc.: East African Literature Bureau.

[3] In *Song of Lawino,* a woman by the name of Lawino complains about her Westernized husband Ochol. In the song's evocative and poetic lyrics, Lawino defends her traditional way of life. She rejects in no uncertain terms the way her husband tries to imitate Western-style behaviour. *Song of Lawino* is a continuation of the oral traditions of the Acholi in the north of Uganda, the region where Okot p'Bitek was born. *Song of Lawino* was later published together with *Song of Ochol* .

[4] Evans-Pritchard (1902-1973) was a prominent British anthropologist primarily known for his publications on the Nuer in the south of Sudan. He was a professor at Oxford University from 1946 to 1970, where he collaborated with Godfrey Lienhardt, most of whose publications focused on the Dinka in Sudan.

increasingly attributed a metaphysical dimension to the African gods. Okot urged his fellow African academics to reveal the 'truth about Africa.'[5] Being an anthropologist himself, Okot made every effort in *Religion of the Central Luo*, 1971, to define his 'truth' about one African religious system in particular.[6] In *African Religions in Western Scholarship*, he expanded this line of thinking to include African religious systems in general.

In this paper, I would like to analyse, and localise, the views Okot p'Bitek gradually formulated about African religion, in relation to the Western discourse on 'African Traditional Religion'. I would like to note in this connection that Okot himself, who reproached his colleagues, including those from Africa itself, for modelling the African gods after a Western Christian image, was similarly 'guilty' of a certain degree of modelling, in his efforts to de-Hellenise the African gods. He also derived this model from a discussion on Western theology, the God-is-dead movement of the 1960s, which culminated in John Robinson's *Honest to God*. In other words, Okot p'Bitek himself was strongly influenced in his construction of the religious identity of his fellow Africans by the way his own social anthropological identity was formed during his stay in England, an identity that bore the features of a process of alienation.

'African Traditional Religion': From *Orientalism* to *Culture and Imperialism*

I have demonstrated elsewhere that a Western missionary discourse had developed with respect to the concept of 'African Traditional Religion'.[7] I have been inspired in this connection by Edward Said's theory on the discourse he labelled Orientalism. Said viewed Orientalism as a 'style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident' (Said 1978: 2) He characterised Orientalism 'as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient' (Said 1978: 3). A discourse like Orientalism postulates a close link between knowledge and power. It also draws a clear distinction between 'Us' and the 'Other'. We (the West) are capable of knowing the 'Other' and thus of ruling over them, because we are also capable of prescriptively defining them by using subtle mechanisms to impose our model of their identity on them.

Working from Said's views, I have tried to define the contours of a Western-dominated discourse on 'African Traditional Religion' as part of a comprehensive colonial discourse. At the core of the discourse is a design of a religious system

[5] Okot p'Bitek 1971a: 7.
[6] Okot p'Bitek, *Religion of the Central Luo* (1971) Nairobi, etc.: East African Literature Bureau.
[7] Rinsum, Henk J. van (1999) and Rinsum, Henk J van, n.d.

with a pyramidal structure that went schematically from dynamism via spirits to a Supreme Being. 'African Traditional Religion' conceived as a discourse, had its own dynamic evolution, and missionaries like Edwin W. Smith[8] and Henri Junod[9] were its leading pioneers. They were strongly influenced by the 19th-century tradition of liberal theology, and it was on the basis of this theology that they were more appreciative in their evaluation of religious systems in Africa than was hitherto commonly the case. They were of the opinion that there definitely was evidence of an inherent religious experience on the part of the people they did their missionary work among. In particular, the missionary Edwin W. Smith of the Primitive Methodist Church referred to the presence of a rudimentary awareness of God among the people of Africa.[10] However, these pioneers were still working very much in the tradition of 19th-century evolutionary thinking, whereby according to them, religion, including 'African Traditional Religion', would ultimately develop into Christian monotheism. In their view, Christianity with Jesus Christ as the central figure, was to be the natural continuation of 'African Traditional Religion' and its ultimate 'fulfillment.' This view was decisive in shaping the direction of their missionary work. The bridge between Christianity and the native religiosity was laid via the postulate of the rudimentary awareness of God in the 'pagans' of Africa. 'African Traditional Religion' was not viewed as a unique system, but as a *praeparatio evangelica*, a preparation for the Gospel.

A religious anthropological line ran parallel to this theological line via authors such as Evans-Pritchard, particularly in *Nuer Religion* published in 1956, and Lienhardt in his *Divinity and Experience*: *The Religion of the Dinka*, published in 1961, as well as later anthropologists such as Victor Turner and Mary Douglas.[11] One important feature of this line lay in the fact that religion was attributed with an independent position in the thinking of these anthropologists. Religion was not the product of some other field, religion was *sui generis*.[12] The monograph *Nuer Reli-*

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[8] See especially Rinsum, Henk J. van (n.d.). Edwin W. Smith worked as a missionary in the former Northern Rhodesia, now Zambia, among the Ila group. He co-authored *The Ila-speaking peoples of Northern Rhodesia* with A. Murray Dale.

[9] At the beginning of the 20th century, Henri Junod worked among the Thonga in the south of what is now Mozambique. He wrote what has since become the classic monograph *The Life of a South African Tribe*.

[10] See his *African Ideas of God* (1950). He edited this book and wrote a comprehensive introduction to the theme.

[11] Westerlund referred to 'religio-phenomenological approaches' (Westerlund 1993: 44 ff).

[12] See, in particular, Evans-Pritchard: 'I do not deny that peoples have reasons for their beliefs – that they are rational; I do not deny that religious rites may be accompanied by emotional experiences, that feeling may even be an important element in their performance; and I certainly do not deny that religious ideas and practices are directly associated with social groups – that religion, whatever else it may be, is a social phenomenon. What I do deny is that it is explained

gion by Evans-Pritchard played an influential role in this connection. Under the supervision of Evans-Pritchard, who succeeded Radcliffe-Brown in 1946 and headed the Institute of Social Anthropology until 1970, Oxford developed into the centre of this academic line. Evans-Pritchard emphasised the need for the 'translation of cultural values into the language of the anthropologist's culture - an essentially humanist rather than a scientific pursuit' (Kuper 1983: 127).

> These orientations came to dominate the Oxford school which he built up, and, referring always to the classics of the *Année* school, the Oxford anthropologists began to develop an idealist position which marked them off from their colleagues elsewhere in Britain. These tendencies may have been related to the odd fact that several of the members of the department were converts to Roman Catholicism, including Evans-Pritchard himself. (Kuper 1983: 127)

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, there was a critical period when both the discourse itself and the opposition to it, became entangled in the decolonisation process. To an increasing extent, Africans who had specialised in religious studies and theology, carried on the line of the discourse on 'African Traditional Religion'. Important authors in this connection included the Kenyan theologian and scholar of religion John S. Mbiti[13] and the Nigerian theologian E. Bolaji Idowu.[14] Although Mbiti and Idowu wrote within the confines of the discourse, they also, at the same time, made every effort to Africanise the concept of 'African Traditional Religion' in a period when the concept of *Uhuru*, the new-found African independence, was occupying a central position. Mbiti, and to an even greater extent Idowu, tried to present a Pan-African alternative to Western Christianity. 'African Traditional Religion' was transformed into 'African religion', a symbiosis of Christian and African religious elements.[15] In the 1960s and 1970s, this discourse was actively institutionalised in the intellectual practices of the new African universities and thus came to play a decisive role for later generations of anthropologists, as well as for theologians and specialists in

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by any of these facts, or all of them together, […]' (Evans-Pritchard 1965: 111).

[13] See in particular his *African Religions and Philosophy* (1969), *Concepts of God in Africa* (1970), and *Introduction to African Religion* (1975).

[14] See *Olódùmarè, God in Yoruba belief* (1963), *Towards an indigenous church* (1965), and especially *African Traditional Religion: A Definition* (1973).

[15] In his influential *African Religions and Philosophy* (1969), John Mbiti still referred to 'African traditional religions in the plural because there are about one thousand African peoples (tribes), and each has its own religious system' (Mbiti 1969: 1). In *An Introduction to African Religion*, he switched from the plural to the singular and referred consistently to 'African religion'.

religious studies.[16] At the same time, however, the discourse provoked strong reactions. I have already referred to Said as the author who first sketched the contours of a dominant Western discourse in his *Orientalism*. And it was also Said who continued this line in *Culture and Imperialism*, demonstrating that the global pattern of a dominant Western culture simultaneously aroused resistance to this dominance.[17]

In Africa as well, there was growing resistance to Western colonial, and later neo-colonial dominance and the intellectual effects accompanying it. The points of departure of the colonial discourse itself were debated and sometimes radically rejected. Immediately after the Second World War, a group headed mainly by Leopold Sedar Senghor[18] and Aimé Césaire[19], channelled the opposition to Western intellectual dominance into a movement that came to be known as *Negritude*. It can best be described as a literary and artistic movement striving for a revaluation of African cultural values and its own black identity. The movement's followers found themselves in the paradoxical situation of having themselves been educated very much within the framework of the Western academic and cultural discourse, and were thus focused on Western academic and artistic circles. 'From the very beginning Negritude's strength was also its weakness: it wanted to impress the oppressor' (Schipper 1999:90). There was fervent opposition to the movement on the part of authors like Chinua Achebe from Nigeria and Ngugi wa Thiong'o from Kenya, who both reproached representatives of Negritude for excessively articulating their criticism of Western dominance within a Western conceptual framework.[20]

The Ugandan author and scholar Okot p'Bitek (1931-1982) played a prominent role in the opposition to Western dominance and Negritude alike. The spearhead of his criticism of the colonial discourse was the way African religious systems had been interpreted within a Western conceptual framework.

Okot p'Bitek. Biographical Information[21]

[16] See e.g. Westerlund 1985.

[17] 'What I left out of Orientalism was that response to Western dominance which culminated in the great movement of decolonization all across the Third World' (Said 1994: xii).

[18] Leopold Sedar Senghor was one of Senegal's most famous poets and statesmen. From 1960 to 1980 he was President of Senegal. He was also one of the leading figures of the African Socialism movement, and was educated in Paris, where he attended the Sorbonne.

[19] Aimé Césaire came from Martinique, an island in the Caribbean, and was educated in Paris. He is especially known for his poem *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* published in 1939.

[20] See e.g. Wole Soyinka 1976.

[21] See e.g. Heron 1984 and Lubwa p'Chong 1986.

Okot p'Bitek was born on 9 June, 1931 in Gulu in the north of Uganda in the house of a Western missionary, Ms. Brown Cave. His father was Opii Bitek, who changed his name to Zebedayo Opil Bitek after his conversion to Christianity. He was married to Serina Lacaa (Lacwaa). Both parents were Christians, but retained certain elements of their traditional way of life. Okot's mother was a well-known dancer and composer of songs, and Okot's father was a famous story-teller and dancer from the Patiko chiefdom (Pa-Cua clan).

Okot attended Primary School and High School in Gulu, after which he went to Kampala, to King's College Budo, a school originally established for the children of the Baganda aristocracy. Here he was introduced to the *Song of Hiawatha* written by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and it left a lasting impression on him. After having spent time at the Government Teacher Training College, Mbarara (1951-1952), he joined the teaching staff at the Sir Samuel Baker's School in Gulu where he taught English and Religious Education. Here he wrote the first drafts of *Wer pa Lawino*, later known as *Song of Lawino*.

Okot also became politically active. He was one of the founding members of the Uganda National Congress, Gulu Branch, and was elected a member of the Acholi District Council.

Okot left for England in 1956 as a member of the national Ugandan soccer team, and stayed there to continue his studies. In 1956-1957, he followed a one-year post-graduate course at Bristol University and obtained a Diploma in Education. In 1957-1960, he studied at Aberystwyth University in Wales where he gained an Honours degree in Law. Heron noted that 'It was during this period that Okot lost his Christian commitment' (Heron 1984: 3). Okot gradually developed a passion for learning more about his own roots in Africa in general, and in Uganda in particular. When a professor in Legal History was discussing a 'Trial by Ordeal,' Okot saw the parallel with traditional customs in the north of Uganda, the region where he was born, and he became deeply interested in Social Anthropology.

During his stay in Wales, Okot also became interested in the Welsh passion for music and songs. He also attended the Edinburgh Festival. In 1960-1963, Okot studied social anthropology at St. Peter's College at Oxford University.[22] He spent a short period in Uganda in 1962 doing fieldwork for his thesis, *Oral Literature and its Background among the Acholi and Lang'o* (1963). His mentors at Oxford were E.E. Evans-Pritchard, G. Lienhardt and J. Beattie. His stay in Oxford played an important role in shaping his ideas about Western dominance as manifested, for

[22] This College had a macabre link with Uganda, since it financed Bishop James Hannington's fatal journey to Uganda in 1885, which ended with his murder (Lubwa p'Chong 1986: 6).

example, in the way anthropologists viewed Africa. Lubwa p'Chong quotes Okot as follows:

> If one entered the university with pride and curiosity, the first few months were filled with shock, anger, irritation and a feeling that one was in a totally wrong place. (Lubwa p'Chung 1986: 6)

Lubwa p'Chong noted that Okot was extremely dissatisfied with the theories he was presented with at Oxford. In his later publications about the religion of the Acholi, it was mainly these theories formulated by such authors as Evans-Pritchard and Lienhardt that aroused his most biting criticism.

Starting in 1963, Okot p'Bitek worked at Makerere University until he was appointed the first African director of the Uganda National Cultural Centre and National Theatre in 1966. He published *Song of Lawino* that year, although it had in fact been published earlier in Acholi as *Wer pa Lawino*.

In an interview with Robert Serumaga in Februari 1967, Okot mentioned the fact that he had travelled to Oxford 'to present his thesis for D.Phil in religion'.[23] There is indeed a manuscript in the Oxford University Bodleian Library classified as 'unsubmitted D.Phil. thesis', entitled *Religious Ideas of the Jo Pa Luo of the Northern Bunyoro*. The title page reads 'Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of Oxford', dated: 'Trinity Term 1970'. Enclosed in the thesis is Okot p'Bitek's summary entitled *Religious Ideas and Practices of the Jo-Pa-Luo of Northern Bunyoro*. For some reason, Okot was not awarded his Ph.D. degree at Oxford. This information was provided by the librarian at the Bodleian Library. The text of this thesis was published in 1971 under the title *The Religion of the Central Luo*.

In 1969, Okot was dismissed as director of the National Theatre in Kampala. His severe criticism of politicians, expressed for example in *Song of Lawino,* was thought to have played a role in his dismissal. He left for Kenya, and spent the next eleven years outside Uganda. In 1979, after the fall of General Idi Amin's reign of terror, he returned to Makerere University, where he was appointed Senior Research Fellow at the Makerere University Institute of Social Research, an appointment which he actually took as an insult. It was not until 1982 that he was appointed Professor of Creative Writing, but died five months later, on 20 July, 1982.

[23] Duerden, Dennis & Cosmo Pieterse, 1972. This is the only reference to Okot's D.Phil. thesis I could find in the literature.

Okot and his Criticism of the Western Colonial Discourse

Okot formulated his criticism of the Western colonial discourse at various different, but interacting, levels.

Jok versus *Kwoth*

First and foremost, Okot p'Bitek formulated his criticism of the Western discourse on African religion along academic anthropological lines. In 1963, he published the article 'The Concept of Jok among the Acholi and the Lango' in the *Uganda Journal*, incorporating substantial material from his Bachelor's thesis. The study entitled *Religion of the Central Luo* was published in 1971. Around 1968, he also published an article bearing the significant title *Is Jok God?*

I call this level religiously specific because Okot confined himself geographically and substantively to a study of the religious activities of the Lango and the Acholi. At this point, I would like to examine more closely how the definition of the concept of *Jok* developed, given that its development and Okot's own interpretation of it, became a central point in his criticism of the discourse on 'African Traditional Religion'. Okot later expanded his views regarding *Jok* into a generic criticism of the Western concept of African religions.

Okot notes that *Jok* had been seen as High God, Supreme Being or *Mana* by early ethnographers and missionaries, and he commented as follows about them:

> All our students of Acholi and Lango religion occupied themselves with one task, to find the meaning of the term JOK. [....] Having assumed what Jok stood for, they endeavoured to order the available material to suit their assumptions. ***They became slaves of their definitions*** [emphasis mine]. (Okot 1963, 16)

Okot categorically rejected both the High God and the Mana interpretations. The central issue, however, would seem to have been whether or not *Jok* was equivalent to *Kwoth*, as conceptualized by Evans-Pritchard in *Nuer Religion*. If we examine the Tables of Contents in *Nuer Religion* and *Religion of the Central Luo*, one aspect immediately catches the eye. The opening chapter of *Nuer Religion* was entitled 'God'. In the words of Evans-Pritchard:

> The Nuer word we translate as 'God' is *kwoth*, Spirit. [...] I discuss the conception of God first because the other spiritual conceptions are dependent on it and can only be understood in relation to it. (Evans-Pritchard 1956: 1)

Elsewhere in *Nuer Religion*, Evans-Pritchard noted that:

> Since God is *kwoth* in the sense of all Spirit and the oneness of Spirit, the other spirits, whilst distinct with regard to one another, are all, being also *kwoth*, thought of as being of the same nature as God. Each of them, that is to say, is God regarded in a particular way; and it may help us if we think of the particular spirits as figures or representations or refractions of God in relation to particular activities, events, persons, and groups. (Evans-Pritchard 1956: 107)

The Kenyan historian Bethell Ogot was largely in agreement with Evans-Pritchard as regards *Jok*: 'Much of what Evans-Pritchard says about *Kwoth*, Spirit, could be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to *Jok*' (Ogot 1961: 127). Ogot did notice, however, that there were contradictions between Jok as Spirit, as spirits, and as body, but he solved these contradictions with the assistance of Tempels' *Bantu-Philosophy* which argued that different manifestations of life-force, or 'vital force', were hierarchically ordered. Okot, however, rejected the notion of a hierarchic structure with God at the top, and in 1963, Okot ended an article with the significant line: 'But there was no high god to whom all knees were bended' (Okot 1963: 28).

Okot presented his own interpretation of *Jok* as a generic classification for a totality of a spiritual world, the specific meaning of which was dependent on the context.

> When the Nilotes encounter *jok*, it is with a specific and named or easily definable *jok*, and not some vague "power" that they communicate with. The proper name identifies the *jok*, placing it in a specific category and social context, for action. (Okot 1971a: 71)
>
> It is clear from the above summary that *jok* is not one thing but many and different things or powers. Claims that *jok* is the Supreme Being do not seem to be based on any concrete evidence, and must be rejected. (Okot 1971a: 79)

Okot divided the spiritual world of the Acholi and Lango into three important groups. First there was the chiefdom Jok, and then there was the group of the 'spirits of known relatives.' Okot subdivided them into 'spirits of ancestors, heads of lineages' who were usually kindly disposed towards people, 'spirits of relatives born abnormally, especially twins' who were feared, and 'spirits who died with grudges' who were very deeply feared. Lastly, there were the 'spirits of unknown persons and dangerous beasts'. This group was hostile to people and causes diseases and other harm. Efforts were made to identify these spirits via spirit possession, and then render them harmless by performing the necessary rituals.

Okot emphatically addressed the difference between the religion of the Acholi and Lango, as he perceived it, and the religion of the Nuer and Dinka as described by Evans-Pritchard and Lienhardt. Okot also noted that, unlike the Nuer and Dinka, the Acholi and Lango turned their thoughts and actions towards their ancestors rather than to other 'spiritual beings.' Okot's views clearly differed from those expressed by Evans-Pritchard and Lienhardt.

> The great variety of the forms of Jok among the Central Luo does not surprise anyone acquainted with the religion of the Nilotes. According to Evans-Pritchard and Godfrey Lienhardt, the Nuer and Dinka regard the natural species or class of objects which they respect as being in some manner emblems or representations of Spirit. The fundamental question is whether the different forms of Jok among the Central Luo were manifestations or emblems of another power. Were the Central Luo, like their Nuer and Dinka cousins, dualists who saw behind the material and other forms of Jok another or higher and more powerful spirit, a God?
>
> The answer to this question seems to be in the negative. The main difference between Nuer and Dinka religion on the one hand, and that of the Central Luo on the other, lies in this, that as a system of thought, the religion of the Central Luo was concerned with individual causes of misfortune and ill-health. There was no *ultimate* power, one responsible for the sum total of man's sufferings and life. (Okot 1971b: 85)

Okot noted too that the funeral rites and lamentations sung at funerals constituted an important source of information for him. He commented that the Acholi interpreted death in terms of a personal battle between an individual and death. There was a clear awareness that once a person had died, he would not return. On the grounds of the ethnographic data he had collected, Okot presented the Luo and Acholi as a group of people who refused to assent to any reference to something like 'ultimate power', or 'God', and who, at first glance, exhibited 'a clearly irreligious tendency':

> But at this supreme crisis, the Acholi exhibit a clearly irreligious tendency. There is no blinking at death. It is faced squarely without turning to ultra-human forces for consolation. There is no *heaven* to which the departed retire to join some god in celestial splendour, nor a hell to await the sinful. (Okot 1963: 21-22)
>
> When danger threatened, the Central Luo did all they could to avert it, and to rid the homestead of it. The beliefs and practices I have described, and certain

knowledge of medicines were used to diagnose, explain, interpret the individual causes of misfortune and ill-health, and they also provided means and ways of coping with the individual situations of anxiety and stress. But when all these failed, when the game of ritually acting out of their deeply felt needs and desires and hopes had produced no satisfactory results, at this level, the Central Luo became sceptical and irreligious, and preferred to face the facts of life coolly and realistically. When your son died you wept, but amid tears, you declared, "*Wi-lobo*"; "This is the way of the world"! (Okot 1971b: 160)

Intermezzo 1: Okot as a Social Anthropologist

At various spots in his early publications, there is evidence of Okot's views on anthropological fieldwork and the methodological perspective he felt anthropologists should work from. Okot showed himself to be a social anthropologist totally averse to any form of speculation. His dissatisfaction with the way Western missionaries and anthropologists interpreted the meaning of African gods in terms of their own conceptual framework, led him to believe that a process of participant observation should be the main approach.

His 1963 article and his book about the religion of the central Luo revealed an Okot manifesting himself as a thorough social anthropologist putting a strong emphasis on the need for a sound anthropological fieldwork methodology. It was a matter of observation and analysis, rather than speculation.[24] Okot made frequent references to the story, told by Father J.P. Crazzolara, about Italian missionaries asking the Acholi about their 'Creator', but because such a figure was unknown in their religious system, they had no idea how to answer the question. This did not fit in with the schematic thinking of the missionaries, however, so they simply continued posing questions. At their wits' end, the Acholi finally said 'Ruhanga'. Ruhanga, the 'Hunchback', being the *jok* held responsible for deformities. In many of his publications, Okot cited this story to illustrate how the missionaries and early ethnographers tried to fit what they saw as facts into the assumptions on the basis of which they approached the Acholi. 'The aim apparently was to obtain *satisfactory answers* whether truthful or otherwise' (Okot 1963: 15). In 1963, Okot suggested a very different method:

[24] See also Okot 1964a: 'Would they [African scholars, HvR] not prefer a cool, sober, methodical and comparative approach, based on a detailed study of a number of African Traditional societies?' (Okot 1964a: 15).

> In trying to find out something of the religious ideas of the Acholi and Lango, I have turned to certain of their activities which may be called religious: funerary rites, ceremonies at shrines and spirit possessional dances. On these occasions the Acholi and Lango, faced with actual or threatened danger, turn for help to ultra-human powers. (Okot 1963: 16)

In 1971b, Okot noted the importance of lengthy participant observation:

> If religion is to be understood as the relationship between men and the ultrahuman powers which they believe affect their lives, and if we are to learn what these powers are, and the people's attitudes to them, it would be necessary for the student to stay longer than seven months, and get a deep knowledge of the language of the people, and also to soak himself in the everyday life of the people. (Okot 1971b: 53)

In a reaction to Beidelman, who had commented on Okot's *Acholi Folk Tales* published in 1963, Okot retorted that an anthropologist would be wise to stick to his own specialisation. Otherwise there would be:

> the dangers that an anthropologist may run into when he refuses to be content with describing the more observable aspects of the life of a people and to indulge in psychological speculations. [....] social anthropologists who are not also competent psychologists might do well to be content with asking socio-logical questions and trying to answer them. There may well be psychological interpretations of folk tales, but humility dictates that we should leave certain things unto Caesar. (Letters to the editor, *Transition*, 1964 3(10): 5-6)

Okot proved himself to be a good methodological pupil of the British school, and in this sense, his period in Oxford definitely shaped his character. Although Okot had a somewhat negative opinion of Evans-Pritchard's ideas in many respects, he acknowledged nonetheless that Evans-Pritchard and his colleague Lienhardt were both quite thorough in their fieldwork. In his early publications, Okot p'Bitek presented himself as a cool analytical observer engaged in the careful dissection of the Western conceptualization of *Jok*, particularly as conceived by the missionaries, and then countered it with his personal views based on his own fieldwork conducted in accordance with the methodology of social anthropology.

African Deities versus Hellenisation

In his *African Religions in Western Scholarship*, published in 1971, Okot p'Bitek tried to formulate his criticism of the Religious Studies and missionary discourse on 'African Traditional Religion' at a higher, generic religious level. It was no longer a criticism of the conceptualisation of *Jok* in its local context, but a criticism of how, for centuries, the West had kept Africa in general and African religions in particular confined to Western conceptual frameworks. Okot began his tirade by criticising the practice of Social Anthropology, which he censured for solely defending colonial interests and for continuing the myth of the 'Primitive'. He felt that the end of Social Anthropology in Africa was at hand, and since it was 'born to serve the practical needs of the colonial system, it was bound to die with the system' (Okot 1971a: 106).

Okot's fierce indictment focused mainly on the 'Hellenisation' of African religions. As far as I have been able to trace, he first used the term 'Hellenisation' in his article 'Is Jok God?' which was published in 1968 or 1969, and in his article 'De-Hellenising the Church', dated August 1969, and published in the *East Africa Journal*.[25] What did Okot mean by Hellenisation? To answer this question, Okot took the reader back to the early history of Christianity, which he contended began as a Jewish Christianity still strongly focused on this world. Hellenisation as such, only began with Paul:

> The synthesis of Greek philosophy and Hebrew scripture was carried out by so-called Christian apologists, who, on the whole were non-Jewish Christian converts, trained to think in Hellenic terms. [....] men, who hellenized the conception of the Jewish deity JHVR into the Supreme Being, a Person or Trinity of Persons whose attributes were Omnipotence, Omnipresence, Eternity, etc.. (Okot 1971a: 86)

> When Christianity embraced Greek philosophy and the Christian faith became hellenised, it developed into, perhaps, the *most imposing theological system* that man ever erected [italics are mine]. (Okot 1968 or 1969: 6)

According to Okot, this process of Hellenisation was, even in his own time, still being applied to African religious systems by 'students of African religion'. This led Okot to conclude that there were 'intellectual smugglers' at work who were modelling African religions on Western Hellenised Christianity.

Who were these intellectual smugglers? Okot distinguished three groups of

[25] In essence, both of these articles served as the basis for his *African Religions in Western Scholarship*.

them. Firstly, there were Christian apologists, such as the anthropologists (and Okot's mentors!) Lienhardt and Evans-Pritchard. Their audience was a Western one, and Okot defined their hidden agenda as follows:

> They use African deities to prove that the Christian God does exist, and is known also among African peoples. (Okot 1971a: 41)

In Okot's opinion, this led Evans-Pritchard to interpret *Kwoth* in terms of the Christian God. In this connection, Okot quoted Evans-Pritchard as saying: 'Fundamentally, in his account of a primitive people the anthropologist is not only describing their social life as accurately as he can, but is expressing himself also.'[26] Okot referred, in this connection, to the atmosphere in Oxford at the time, by quoting in a footnote a gloomy portrait of it by Gary Trompf, and with obvious approval.[27]

In the second place there were African nationalists such as Kenyatta, Senghor, Danquah and so forth. Their audiences consisted of '*unbelieving* Europeans', and it was their wish to demonstrate that the African is indeed a civilised person. Okot reproached them for distorting their own world of gods to suit Western models.

> They dress up African deities with Hellenic robes and parade them before the Western world. (Okot 1971a: 41)

In Okot's view, these African academics wanted to counterbalance the Western arrogance that characterised African religion as inferior.

Lastly, there were missionaries like Edwin Smith, John Taylor and Placide Tempels. Their audiences consisted of 'highly sensitive and easily provocable new African élites, whose hearts they wish to win for the Christian God.' Their aim was to demonstrate that 'Africans are, as they have always been, highly religious and moral peoples' (Okot 1971a: 41).

These three groups, each with a different point of departure and interests, came together in the programme of 'Hellenising African religion'. 'This-worldiness' increasingly became 'Other-worldiness.' 'Strong' became 'omnipotent', 'wise' became 'omniscient', 'old' became 'eternal', and 'great'

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[26] Okot quotes Evans-Pritchard here from his *Social Anthropology* (Okot 1971a: 66).

[27] 'Conservative Oxford was not the place in which enthusiasts for non-Christian religious ideas could sparkle. If there were enthusiasts, the overpowering dominance of the High Church party tended to subdue them or forced them to couch their ideas in more apologetic, sometimes reactive language, rather than to present learned or popular treatises ready for immediate cash value on the intellectual market' (Okot 1971a: 69).

became ‘omnipresent’.

Intermezzo 2: Okot as a Critic

Okot may well have seemed to be an analytical scholar in his early publications, presenting the ‘cool and sober’ academic approach he was taught at Oxford, but in *African Religions in Western Scholarship* he revealed another side of his character and emerged as an indignant critic of Western arrogance. In this political pamphlet, he made no bones about his furious response to the way African religions and the African gods had been distorted to fit the Hellenistic model.[28] It was not only Western arrogance that he denounced, but also the way a number of African scholars went along with the Western perception of African gods.[29] It was at this point that Okot p’Bitek denounced social anthropologists as accomplices of Western dominance.

The cool analysis had at this stage been replaced by a style that exhibited all the features of a virulently provocative vehemence, accompanied by a careless dearth of meticulousness.[30] In his review of *African Religions in Western Scholarship* (1971), Peter Rigby pointed out numerous spelling errors, inaccuracies, and missing references. It has to be said, however, that the book has some excellent passages written with a blazing eloquence reminiscent of the Okot p’Bitek of *Song of Lawino*.

Lawino versus Ocol

Lastly, there was the level of the more comprehensive criticism penned mainly by Okot the cultural African nationalist he became in his later works such as *Africa’s Cultural Revolution* and the posthumously published *Artist, the Ruler*. The Ghanaian philosopher Kwasi Wiredu noted:

> If truth be told, Okot p’Bitek was the true pioneer of conceptual decolonization in African philosophy. His *African Religions in Western Scholarship* might well have been sub-titled ‘The decolonization of African Religions’. (Wiredu 1998)

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[28] Horton notes: ‘The Book, however, was written in a furious, poetic, acid style rather than in cool, sober academic prose’ (Horton 1993: 161).

[29] In Okot 1972a, he refers to Mbiti as the ‘chief intellectual smuggler. He earned his title because he smuggled enough Greek metaphysical material to hellenise three hundred African deities’ (Okot 1972a: 29).

[30] Lubwa p’Chong ended his short biographical notes on Okot with the well-chosen words: ‘Thus Okot continually provoked as he advised, lamented, challenged, questioned and criticised with his scorpion-tail tongue and razor-sharp pen throughout his fifty-one years of life’ (Lubwa p’Chong 1986: 12).

Okot's criticism of the Western missionary discourse was part of his wider criticism of the colonial discourse. In this sense, it would be feasible to view Okot p'Bitek as one of the post-colonial authors who formulated fundamental criticism of the colonial discourse after the Negritude stage. In the opinion of these authors, Negritude and its leaders Senghor and Aimé Cesaire, were too focused on the issue of being black within the borders of internalised Western norms.[31] In this sense, Okot p'Bitek shared his views with such African authors as Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong'o. In the 1960s, a number of them were working at Makerere University in Uganda and writing for *Transition*,[32] a journal published there.[33] They found a common cause in their desire to decolonise African literature and the science of literature at the new African universities. Uganda and Makerere University, in particular, were the centres of the cultural nationalism then manifesting itself in the burgeoning literature and drama of Africa.[34]

Intermezzo 3: Okot p'Bitek as a Poet

Okot p'Bitek was particularly drawn to the pursuit of his own authentic expression and on the formulation of his criticism of the colonial discourse, literature rooted in the African oral tradition was an important medium for him. It was the *Song of Lawino* and the *Song of Ocol* especially, that established Okot p'Bitek's status as cultural African nationalist, with his presentation of the proud African woman Lawino as the eloquent mouthpiece of his indictment of the Western discourse, and Ocol as the embodiment of the Westernised African. Okot emerged here as a gifted story-teller able to present his analysis and criticism of the Western influence in compelling language. As Ngugi Wa Thiong'o rightly noted in his Introduction to Okot's *Africa's Cultural Revolution*: 'He has also a gift, too rare in most writers, of creating characters who live, exist, breathe, independently of the author-characters, moreover, who are at the centre of a pressing moral debate'.

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[31] 'Negritudism is a creation of the alienated Black man. What else could you expect of the Black man in exile, in the *diaspora*, whether in the Caribbean or in Paris, torn from home, either by the 'rape of Africa' called the slave trade; or by the alienating process at home miscalled education?' (Okot 1986: 63). Mazrui, on the other hand, referred to *Song of Lawino* as a 'neo-negritudist poem' (Mazrui 1978: 212).

[32] After being 'on the road' for quite some time, the journal finally came to rest at Duke University in the USA where a number of African and Afro-American literary specialists still keep it going.

[33] See e.g. Breitinger 1999.

[34] See e.g. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o 1986.

The Honest to God Debate. Articulation of Criticism

The process Okot p'Bitek referred to as the Hellenisation of the African gods and spiritual world, became increasingly the main target of his biting criticism. The 'De-Hellenist' had virtually become his honorary title.[35] As was noted above, Okot p'Bitek made extensive use of the Hellenisation concept for the first time in his 1969 article 'De-Hellenising the Church'. It was a book review of *The Future of Belief: Theism in a World Come of Age,* written by the Roman Catholic theologian Leslie Dewart and published in 1967. Dewart formulated the reason for writing his book as follows:

> More concretely, it will be suggested that the integration of theism with today's everyday experience requires not merely the *demythologization of Scripture* but the more comprehensive *de-Hellenization of dogma*, and specifically that of the Christian doctrine of God. (Dewart 1967: 49)

This book stimulated Okot p'Bitek to formulate his criticism of the Western view of the African gods, in terms of the Hellenisation process.[36] And it was Dewart who presented him with the concept of de-Hellenisation: 'It is our own invention, not God's, and what we have invented we may improve upon' (Dewart 1967: 213). Dewart advocated new ways of speaking about God without giving Him a name. 'We may all have to learn that to say certain things well it is sometimes better to leave others unsaid' (Dewart 1967: 214).[37]

Dewart was part of a broader Western theological debate which focused on the friction between the experience of a post-war generation and the traditional Christian image of God, a discussion that culminated in 1963 in the publication of *Honest to God* by the English Bishop of Woolwich, John A.T. Robinson. Like Dewart, Robinson posed the question of how Christian faith could be moulded into a new shape in modern times. Robinson was of the opinion that the traditional formulation of Christianity was centred on supranaturalism. God 'out there' occupied a central position in Christianity. But there was growing friction between this metaphysical way of thinking, this 'theism' that coincided with what Dewart

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[35] See e.g.. Sandra Greene 1996.

[36] In Chapter 10 of *African Religions in Western Scholarship*, Okot acknowledged that Dewart's theories had corroborated much of his own thinking. On page 86 he quoted Dewart and stated his source, but in the next paragraph on page 87, the sentence 'Moreover, Hellenization introduced into Christianity the ideas of immutability, stability, and impassibility as the central perfections of God' was almost literally taken from Dewart without stating the source (Dewart 67: 134).

[37] This is the quotation Okot used in Okot 1971a, be it that deliberately or not, he quoted quite carelessly: 'We learn that to say certain things well it is sometimes better to leave them unsaid' (Okot 1971a: 97). Dewart used the word 'others' here instead of 'them'.

called Hellenisation, and the modern way of thinking in 'a world come of age.' In Robinson's work, as well as that of other authors, the rejection of traditional theism led to an appreciation of a certain form of atheism: 'I'm prepared to be an agnostic with the agnostics, even an atheist with the atheists' (Robinson 1963: 127).

Robinson noted that three people had played a major role in shaping his way of thinking as expressed in *Honest to God*. Firstly, he referred to the German-born theologian Paul Tillich, who defined God as the 'ground of our being,' secondly to Rudolf Bultmann, with his demythologizing of God 'out there' and finally to the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer who spoke about 'Christianity without religion'. Robinson felt that both the Christian faith and the entire body of acts it practised, were in danger if no radically new forms were developed.

> And that will be because it (Christian faith, HvR) is moulded, in the form we know it, by a cast of thought which, with their different emphases, Bultmann describes as 'mythological,' Tillich as 'supranaturalist,' and Bonhoeffer as 'religious'. (Robinson 1963: 125)

From the very start, *Honest to God* was a highly controversial book, and it was soon followed by a booklet entitled *The Honest to God Debate*, containing articles by supporters and opponents alike.

The question remains as to how Okot p'Bitek was influenced by this movement, which seemingly had presented him with a model he could use to formulate his criticism of the Western discourse on African religion. It is likely that he had become acquainted with the theories that generated this movement during his stay in England. In Uganda too, he had been able to become familiar with this literature and these ideas. F. B. Welbourn, who lectured in religious sciences at Makerere University, for example, had published an article in *Transition* on *Honest to God* and *The Honest to God Debate*.[38]

Another book that undoubtedly played an important role in the transfer of these theological ideas was *Men without God: A Study of the Impact of the Christian Message in the North of Uganda* written by J.K. Russell, an Anglican Bishop in northern Uganda, and published in 1966. This book was undoubtedly influenced by Okot p'Bitek, but at the same time, it in turn exerted an influence on him. In the foreword, Russell noted in this connection:

[38] In *Transition*, Volume 0 (Sept. 1963), Welbourn published a short book review of *Honest to God* (pp. 44-45), and in Volume 0, Issue 16 in 1964 he wrote an article called *Myth, Rationalism and Empiricism* in which he extensively reviewed *The Honest to God Debate* (pp. 40-42).

> It will be obvious to the reader that this book could never have been written without the generous and unfailing help of Mr. p'Bitek Okot of Makerere University College, Kampala, who is himself an Acholi. Much of the source material in the book comes from his pioneer work. (Russell 1966: Preface)

In his *Religion of the Central Luo*, Okot p'Bitek also referred to Russell and a personal communication he had had with him.[39] Russell was especially interested in the similarities between the religious conceptions of the Acholi and the ideas of the German theologian Bonhoeffer. He also made references to the ideas of Tillich and Robinson, and quoted the following statement by Bonhoeffer: 'God is teaching us that we must live as men who can get along very well without him' (from: Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, p. 122).[40] Russell linked this Bonhoeffer idea to his own view of the Acholi religious system: 'We succumbed to the temptation to set the Acholi view alongside Bonhoeffer's denial of religion' (Russell 1967: 88). Very much to Russell's regret, Bonhhoeffer's untimely death made it impossible for him to elaborate any further upon his ideas, and he commented sadly: 'How much has the Church in Acholi lost by Bonhoeffer's death!' (Russell 1967: 84). Okot p'Bitek referred to this quotation in 1971a, but gave it a diametrically opposed interpretation by formulating it as follows: 'It is this which has provoked Keith Russell to comment that the early death of Dietrich Bonhoeffer was no great loss [sic! HvR] to the Acholi' (Okot p'Bitek 1971a: 100).

After World War II, at the time when the Christian West was witnessing the evaporation of its religious illusions, the theological discussion sparked by Bonhoeffer, reached its climax with the publication of *Honest to God*. More than anything else, this discussion provided Okot with the conceptual framework that enabled him to articulate his criticism of the Western discourse on African religions.[41]

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[39] In Okot 1973, Chapter 9, The Reading House, Okot reviewed Russell's *Men without God*.

[40] This quote is from a letter dated 16 July 1944 in which Bonhoeffer discussed what he called a 'worldly' interpretation of the Christian faith. The key point in his argumentation was that Christians, if they really wished to follow the line of 'intellectual sincerity,' could no longer childishly revert to a Deus ex Machina, but would have to live 'etsi deus non daretur.'

[41] At the same time, Okot sometimes referred in quite denigrating terms to the 'so-called Protestants': 'Witness the utterly meaningless phrases that they have thrown up as a kind of substitute for the concept of God who dies of cold after the metaphysical robes have been removed from his body. […] Others have thrown up some utterly meaningless, but more important, terribly uninspiring phrases, such as 'Religionless Christianity', 'God beyond God', 'Beyond Religion', 'Ultimate concern', Ultimate Reality', and so forth' (Okot 1986: 53).

‘Even an atheist with the atheists’

In ‘Reflect, Reject, Recreate: A Reply to B.A. Ogot, Ali Mazrui and Peter Rigby’ (1972) Okot p’Bitek states:

> I admit I am neither a Christian nor a pagan. I do not believe in gods or spirits. I do not believe in witchcraft or supernatural forces. Heaven and hell do not make sense to me and for me metaphysical statements are nonsensical. (Okot p’Bitek 1972: 31)

As far back as 1963, Okot p’Bitek defined the phenomenon of religion as follows:

> Such beliefs [in non-natural or mystical causal agents] provide intelligible and acceptable explanations and prescribe actions to be taken; and although the explanations are scientifically false, and the actions do not in fact produce the desired end, (looked at scientifically), the performers feel that they are coping with the situation, and in overt behaviour express their pent-up emotional steam of anxiety. (Okot p’Bitek 1963: 16)

In *Religion of the Central Luo* (1971b), Okot p’Bitek reduced religion to an instrument enabling people to cope with their personal suffering, illnesses and so forth, and to an institution, important for the preservation of the social structure among the Lango and Acholi. Although the use of the term ‘religion’ in his *Religion of the Central Luo*[42] may be regarded as misleading, Okot often used, and for good reason, such terms as religious ideas, religious activity, religious system, beliefs and practices, and so forth, for good reasons. The implication is clearly that to Okot, religion was not a closed system, a system *sui generis*. It consisted instead of numerous very different social activities, interactions with the spiritual world of *jok* in various contextual frameworks emerging in a given society and thereby equipping it to reach multifarious goals and guarantee its continued existence. Apparently, Okot was influenced in this respect by a Durkheimian concept of religion, indeed he was able to write as early as 1963 that:

[42] See in this connection the article by Louis Brenner about ‘‘Religious’ discourses in and about Africa’ in which he constantly put the term religion in quotation marks to show that the concept of religion was a Western one that does not pertain to African reality: ‘How do we analyse ‘religion’ in a society in which the concept of ‘religion’ is absent?’(Brenner 1989: 87). In this connection, see also Jan Platvoet, who made the following comment about ‘non-doctrinal community religions’: ‘Terms and concepts denoting ‘religion’ are nearly always absent from the languages of these societies and from the minds of their believers. [….] It is we who constitute these ‘religions’ in analogy to ‘religion’ and ‘religions’ in modern Western societies’ (Platvoet 1999: 490-491).

> The modes of patterns of living of a people form part of what the French sociologists have called, social facts: defined by their generality, transmission from generation to generation and by their compulsive character. Folk tales and proverbs play a central role in this transmission.(Okot 1963a: 24)

In *Artist, the Ruler* (1986) Okot noted: 'His [the African, HvR] religion, for which he has no term, is the full participation of all sectors of the community: Man, Nature, and Spirits in the life process' (Okot p'Bitek 1986: 22). This is why it was so important to Okot p'Bitek to study the phenomena of religion in its social context. In 1971, he presented a paper at the University of Nairobi, in which he addressed the meaning of the study of African religion at an African university, and the way these religious systems should, and should not, be studied. This article entitled 'African Religion in an African University', was published in *Africa's Cultural Revolution* (1973), and in it, Okot p'Bitek made it very clear how important he felt such studies to be:

> The religion of a people is perhaps the most important aspect of their culture. What they believe governs their lives. It provides their 'world view' - the general direction along which they live their lives, and relate to each other and the universe. [...] The knowledge of the religions of our people is the key to the knowledge of our culture. The aim of the study of African religions in an African university is to know our people. We need to know our people, their outlook on life, their beliefs and ideas, so that we can serve them better. (Okot p'Bitek 1973: 86)

In his definition of religion, Okot p'Bitek was clearly a forerunner of the anthropologist Robin Horton. In essence, Okot's concept of religion was a formulation of the 'intellectualist approach', as it was further developed later by Horton. This intellectualist approach defined 'explanation, prediction and control' as the essential and central functions of African religious thinking which, according to Horton, was as such analogous to the Western scientific system.

We could view Okot p'Bitek as a 'proto-Hortonian', as the man who spearheaded the debate on the intellectualist approach which, through Horton, severely criticised the 'devout opposition' of men like Mbiti or Idowu.[43] As far

[43] Horton defined the 'devout opposition' as follows: 'They are united, however, by a methodological and theological framework, which has been strongly influenced, first and foremost by their own Christian faith, but also by a long tradition of comparative studies of religion carried out by Christian theologians' (Horton 1993: 161). See also Platvoet 1994 and 1996 in which he analysed the peculiar traits of the 'Devout Opposition' (in his terminology the

back as 1975, Horton referred to the ideas of Okot p'Bitek with apparent approval (Horton 1975). In his article 'Judaeo-Christian Spectacles: Boon or Bane to the Study of African Religions?', Horton noted the importance of Okot p'Bitek's more non-conformist ideas.[44]

At the same time however, Okot p'Bitek seems to have been imprisoned in a paradox of his own making, in that he differed so fundamentally from Horton by placing religion in an evolutionary model of development. In essence, Horton viewed religion as a rational system. In Okot p'Bitek's conception, however, modern science and reason came after religion, and he implicitly rejected Horton's Similarity Thesis. In 1963 he wrote:

> In scientifically less-advanced communities such threats [of death, ill health, ill luck etc., HvR] often contradict the limited body of empirical knowledge, and so cannot satisfactorily be explained or dealt with through existing scientific theories and techniques. But there usually exist a complex of beliefs in non-natural or mystical causal agents which may be propitiated by prayer or sacrifice, or used by proper techniques, for the benefit of man. (Okot p'Bitek 1963:17)

In *African Religions in Western Scholarship*, Okot continued even more emphatically along this same line of reasoning and summoned Christian God-is-dead theology as his witness for the prosecution.

> But will the African deities survive the revolution in science and philosophy which killed the Christian God? I doubt it. Christianity has declined because the Christian God used to fill gaps in science, or to deal with life at the point at which things got beyond human explanation or control. This has now been dismissed as intellectual laziness or superstition. The Christian God has become intellectually superfluous and, moreover, the metaphysical statements about him do not make sense to modern man. (Okot p'Bitek 1971a: 112)

He added approvingly and very significantly in terms of his own faith in modernization:

> The belief in these deities [*jogi*, HvR] provides the explanation as well as the

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discourse of 'religionism').

[44] 'The only outsider to have taken the challenge of the new wave of scholars at all seriously seems to have been the Ugandan poet/anthropologist Okot p'Bitek, who gave us a devastating expose of some of the weaknesses of the new approach in his little book *African Religions in Western Scholarship*' (Horton 1993: 161).

> methods of dealing with misfortunes and ill-health. With the advance of medical knowledge, perhaps one day, the people of northern Uganda and other peoples of Africa will tell the diviners, in the words of Voltaire, "You have made ample use of the time of ignorance, superstition, and infatuation, to strip us of our inheritance and strangle us under your feet, that you might fatten on the substance of the fortunate. But tremble for fear that *the day of reason will arrive* [italics are mine]". (Okot p'Bitek 1971a: 112-113)

Okot p'Bitek simultaneously commented that the question of whether or not the African gods and religions would die out, was in fact irrelevant. It should be noted that 'it is a fact that the vast majority of Africans today hold the beliefs of their religions' (Okot p'Bitek 1971a: 113). This fact alone led Okot to conclude that African religions are worthy of careful study, in an honest fashion, in their own contexts, and within their own conceptual frameworks!

Okot was quite aware that in his openly-acknowledged a-theism, he held deviant views on religions as they functioned in African societies. At the same time, Okot p'Bitek was utterly fascinated by the phenomenon of religion, and he did not hesitate to lash out against the Western interpretation of African religious systems; this can be traced back to his own view of religion. It is conceivable that in his academic work, he was in the end overly imprisoned by his own methodological social anthropology perspective, internalised during his education in England, and which he combined with his *Uhuru* ideology. Welbourn noted the presence of a 'double consciousness' in Okot, when commenting in his review of *African Religions in Western Scholarship*:

> It is true that their (Evans-Pritchard's and Lienhardt's) consciousness remains Western and therefore their perception is faulty. But what is Mr Okot's consciousness? A compound of Western scholarship (sadly uncritical when he writes of the Bible or of early Christian history) and of cultural nationalism. (Welbourn 1972: 228)

Perhaps it would be more accurate to speak of to a process of 'alienation' as a mirror image of consciousness. Okot p'Bitek may have been more caught up in 'metropolitan theorising' – a way of thinking and theorising that he internalised during his stay in England - than he himself realised or was willing to admit. He had this problem in common with Negritude, no matter how opposed to it he may have been in fact. It was not only the social anthropology discourse prevalent in Oxford in the days of Evans-Pritchard, but the *Honest-to-God* debate also, that

exerted such a strong influence on Okot p'Bitek's thinking; he used this discussion as an instrument for articulating his criticism of the Western epistemological dominance in the discourse on 'African Traditional Religion'. But could it be that Okot p'Bitek was just as much a slave to his own definition of religion? And could it be that, in consequence, the theological conceptual framework of the God-is-dead theology fitted in perfectly with his definition of religion? It is not without reason that in a reaction to *African Religions in Western Scholarship*, Bethell Ogot commented that Okot p'Bitek himself could also be seen as an intellectual smuggler, because it was he, no less, who carried this Western conceptual framework to Africa in his baggage (Ogot 1971).

From the angle of African Traditional Religion (in the singular!) as a discourse, it is clear that in the 1970s, the torch lit by such patriarchs as Edwin W. Smith and Geoffrey Parrinder, was carried further by respected African theologians and scholars of religions, such as Mbiti and Idowu, and institutionalised at numerous African universities. Westerlund showed how authors like John S. Mbiti, E. Bolaji Idowu, Geoffrey Parrinder, Edwin W. Smith and Placide Tempels were all frequently included on the required reading lists for students at Departments of Religious Studies in the new African universities. These authors had thus been instrumental in making the discourse part and parcel of the education of African intellectuals (Westerlund 1985: 27). This institutionalisation was also evident in the process of decolonisation, when efforts were being made in various fields, including the important field of religion, to shape a uniquely pan-African identity.[45]

The dynamics within the discourse presumed an ongoing discussion and that differing opinions would ultimately serve to strengthen the internal consistency of the discourse. Okot p'Bitek's influence on the direction of the discourse does not seem to have been that sizeable after all. Okot's name was, and still is, primarily associated with his literary production. The reason for this is not, as has been suggested, his furious style and heated words, but that his fundamental criticism of the discourse affected its very foundation. As a discourse, 'African Traditional Religion' had been unable to incorporate criticism that targeted the very heart of the discourse, i.e. the existence of God in and for Africa. Paradoxically enough, Okot p'Bitek articulated his criticism of Western-dominated thinking about religion, on the basis of the same Western theological discourse used in the West to declare the death of its own metaphysical God.

[45] See Jan Platvoet 1989.

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'Wipe the Blackboard Clean ………'
'Academisation' and Christianisation: Siblings in Africa?

My husband
Has read at Makerere University
He has read deeply and widely
But if you ask him a question
He says
You are insulting him;
He opens up with a quarrel
He begins to look down upon you
Saying
You ask questions
That are a waste of time!
He says
My questions are silly questions,
Typical questions from village girls,
Questions of uneducated people,
Useless questions from
Untutored minds.
[.....]
My husband says
Some of the answers
Cannot be given in Acholi
Which is a primitive language
And is not rich enough
To express his deep wisdom.
He says the Acholi language
Has very few words
It is not like the white man's language
Which is rich and very beautiful
A language fitted for discussing
deep thoughts.

(Okot p'Bitek, *Song of Lawino*)

African universities have been the highest transmitters of Western culture in African societies. The high priests of Western civilization in the continent are virtually all products of those cultural seminaries called 'universities. (Mazrui 1992: 105)

Part I Academia and Religion: Double Track

In my article *Honest to Jok*[1], I explained how the Ugandan academic and poet Okot p'Bitek (1931-1982) interpreted the religious system of the Luo as an endogenous system of knowledge which gives people instruments to explain, to predict and to control; a view Robin Horton[2] elaborated on in his 'Intellectualist Approach'. In his *African Religions in Western Scholarship* (1971), Okot set out to demonstrate how Western colonial dominance imposed exogenous elements upon local religious systems in Africa. According to Okot, native religious systems were modelled increasingly after a Western, monotheistic and Hellenistic, i.e. metaphysical standard. This resulted in a distorted image of these religions; a distortion which led to the alienation of African believers, and opposition against the Western imposition.

The theme, prevailing throughout Okot's entire literary and academic work, is his vehement criticism of this Western construction of the identity of 'the Other' in Africa, including his religious identity. At the same time, however, Okot p'Bitek, who put himself upon the stage as an *a*-theist[3], exhibited paradoxical traits, believing as he did in the process of modernisation, and he ultimately put modern science above religion on the ladder of development.[4]

Religion and science seem to have a close but complicated, and sometimes hidden, relationship which was defined in Robin Horton's work in terms of an analogy between modern science and 'African Traditional Religion', because the cognitive processes of explaining, predicting and controlling are active in both domains. However, he also pointed to a major difference between those two systems of thought, science explaining events etc., by the operation of 'impersonal forces' (such as atoms), and African traditional religions attributing them to 'personal forces' (such as spirits). In addition, he noted another distinction, to wit that Western science was an 'open' system of thought, whereas African traditional religion was a 'closed' one. In Horton's words, 'closed' meant that a minimal awareness of possible alternatives for active theoretical conceptions, although hardly articulated, had long existed in traditional cultures. This polarity has been

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[1] See Van Rinsum 2000. The English version is included in this thesis.

[2] Horton also referred to Okot p'Bitek as an exception among African academics virtually all of whom went along with the Western discourse with regard to 'African Traditional Religion'. This group, which Horton characterised as the 'Devout Opposition', defined African religion in terms of their own Christian conceptual framework. See Horton 1993.

[3] 'I admit I am neither a Christian nor a pagan. I do not believe in gods or spirits. I do not believe in witchcraft or supernatural forces. Heaven and hell do not make sense to me; and for me metaphysical statements are nonsensical' (Okot p'Bitek 1972:31).

[4] See Van Rinsum 2000.

criticised by several authors, including the African philosopher, Paulin Hountondji.[5] The notion of a 'closed' system of thought refers to a rather static conception of culture, in the eyes of the critics. Horton toned down this antithesis later, to one between 'adversary' versus 'accommodative'. In examining Horton's use of the term 'adversary', the African academics Appiah and Mudimbe pointed to the major difference between science, which is 'the social organization of enquiry, as a systematic business', and religion as an accommodative system of thought.[6]

Another criticism levelled against Horton, focused on the one-sided cognitive nature of his view of religion. Horton regarded religion first and foremost as a system of knowledge. Other scholars, however, regard religions to be active as systems that feed people spiritually, offer an emotional escape-valve for their existential fears and anxieties, and set them right with their existence on earth.

In this article, I propose to divert the process of the imposition of identities on Africa, violently criticised by Okot p'Bitek, from the domain of religion, i.e. the Christian religion, to the domain of 'academia'. I intend to demonstrate that the complex mechanism of the construction of identities works in a comparable manner in this area.

This similarity can be linked to the tight, but sometimes veiled, relationship between academia and religion during its development in the West. I wish to trace this process back in order to propose a view of the contemporary problems of African universities that is different from the perspectives so often expressed in evaluations and analyses presented by major donors such as the World Bank.[7] Frequently, these publications when dealing with the pitiable situation in which the African universities find themselves, point to the likewise pitiable social-economic situation of the country or region (which can be extended to an area as big as Sub-Saharan Africa) in which the universities are located. The problematic functioning of universities is then linked up with external economic factors at a macro level.

The 'solution' to the problems facing these universities flows more or less naturally from this viewpoint. Universities should be part of a broader mechanism of redistribution between 'the West' (or the North) and the 'Rest (or the South). The necessity for more human and financial resources (from the donors), the

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[5] Hountondji denounced this dichotomy: 'African civilization [is not] a closed system in which we may imprison ourselves (or allow ourselves to be imprisoned)' (Hountondji 1996: 161).

[6] Mudimbe & Appiah 1993: 129-132. See also Appiah 1992, esp. 107-136.

[7] See e.g. Buchert & King 1995, especially Kenneth King's contribution: 'World Bank traditions of support to higher education and capacity-building: reflections on 'Higher Education: The Lessons of Experience''.

strengthening of internal and external efficiency, better and more transparent management and a more sophisticated cycle of planning and control, are stressed.[8] In this essentially modernisation-philosophy, it is expected that the redistribution of human and financial resources with those in the North, will finally lead to the universities in Africa (or broader, the South) catching up with their Northern counterparts. Of course, the present social-economic situation in many parts of Africa has undoubtedly had detrimental effects on the position of universities and the higher educational system in general in Africa. There is a clear interaction between macro-economic developments and the position of tertiary education. One cannot expect a university-system, let alone research in need of large capital assets, to prosper in countries where there is only very limited economic growth or even stagnation. On top of this, there has been a global shift towards an emphasis on strengthening primary and vocational education.

Nevertheless, there is reason to go one step further in identifying the causes of the problems that universities in Africa face. If we critically examine the current scenario of redistribution between universities in the North and in the South, one particular presupposition is never stated explicitly, and that is the idea that the concept of science, the way in which it is practised, and the institutional setting in which it takes place, is a universal one. On the basis of this perception, the universities are the organisational units in which science is institutionalised in universal practices. And this makes the 'Universitas' into a universal institution.[9]

The purpose of this paper is to problematise this assumption that Western science and its modern institutionalisation is universal, and I will do this by continuing along the same track that Okot p'Bitek indicated for one particular academic discipline, i.e. the anthropology of African religions. The development of higher education and research in Africa can best be interpreted as a process of prescriptive construction, or imposition, of an identity. In this process, Western

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[8] Thomas Owen Eisemon & Moussa Kourouma concluded in: *Foreign Assistance for University Development in Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia* as follows: 'It seems clear from this compendium of activities [they listed a number of 'donor interventions', HvR] that donors do not understand rehabilitation of African universities as requiring either a significant infusion of additional resources or even a re-thinking of existing patterns of donor assistance to African universities. The emphasis is on better management of university systems, "networking", institutional sharing and use of new planning and information technologies - presenting opportunities for a vast number of ephemeral donor projects' (Eisemon & Kourouma 1994:295).

[9] A publication issued by the University of Groningen, the Netherlands, dealing with its, praise-worthily active policy in the field of university development co-operation, carries the ominous title *Alma Mater Universalis: co-operation of the University of Groningen with universities in developing countries: state of the art and lessons* (January 2000).

science, being an intrinsic part of the processes of colonisation and globalisation, developed from a local, culturally and historically determined, contingent ethnoscience to a hegemonic discourse.[10]

This hegemonic ambition is based on a fundamental dichotomy *'developed'* (and therefore modern) versus *'not (yet)-developed'* (and therefore still primitive or traditional). 'We' are developed and therefore 'the Other' needs to be developed, after our image. 'We' in the West need this dichotomy. In the words of Hobart:

> In order for them to be able to progress, these peoples have first to be constituted as 'underdeveloped' and ignorant. Conversely, without such underdevelopment and ignorance, the West could not represent itself as developed and possessing knowledge. (Hobart 1993:2)

Pfeifer pointed to an 'accepted assumption: an identity exists which is distinct from the developed in the sense that it is not developed' (Pfeifer 1996).[11] In the words of James Scott: 'High modernism has needed this "other", this dark twin, in order to rhetorically present itself as the antidote to backwardness' (Scott 1998: 331). This dichotomy enables us to determine our position with respect to 'the Other'. We know 'the Other'; 'the Other' is the object of our knowing. 'We' construct and allocate the identity of 'the Other'. In this paper, I relate this process to the universities and scientists and scholars of Africa. By constructing this identity, we tell 'the Others' what is still lacking in them and how it ought to be 'developed'. We, in the 'West', have defined our academic reality as a model and standard, and exported this model, to the 'uttermost part of the world'. In this respect there seems to be a hidden, and as I will argue, a more than merely fortuitous, connection with the domain of religion. In a context of power relations, the West exported its own model of the religious 'reality' and imposed its system coercively upon the peoples of Africa. The 'expatriate' coincides with the Western expert (academic or missionary), who brings Western secular or religious knowledge. The dichotomy unfolds between **'us'**, **believer**, **messenger**, **academic**, and **'the Other'**, **unbeliever**, **receiver** and **ignoramus**.

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[10] Verwayen-Leijh (1994) also emphasised that the model of redistribution does not offer a conclusive explanation for the problems that African universities face. She nonetheless approached the subject from the angle of what she called 'cultural integration' (Verwayen-Leijh 1994: 2).

[11] It is interesting to note that in academic circles in the Netherlands people still talk about the academic discipline of 'niet-westerse sociologie' (Non-Western Sociology), the 'Other' as negation of 'Self'.

If we wish to trace its source, we have to delve back into the history of the development of modern science, and the universities, in the West. What I propose to do is to focus on some of the decisive assumptions underlying a Western paradigmatic model of science and its institutionalisation, by making use of literature from anthropology and the history of science.[12] These assumptions relate to both the cognitive level and to the level of the institutional practices of acquiring and transmitting knowledge. In this model, I leave the claim to universality behind, and focus on Western science as a local and historically contingent system of knowledge and its development, as embedded in the cultural context of the West and, as such, an intrinsic part of a specific and contingent cultural configuration.

In this model, the genesis of science is closely related to the development of the religious system as it unfolded in the West from the late Middle Ages onwards. One of the fundamental epistemological assumptions of Western science is the existence of one, intelligible, universe. This presupposition contests the existence of several, equally valid but mutually exclusive, forms of knowledge. The heart of Western science is the collection of knowledge of this one-and-only universe with its inherent complexity. Science developed on a parallel track, as it were, to the Western religious system, Christianity, with its exclusive claims to not only salvation.[13] Both, after all, were aimed at knowledge of the 'ultimate truth', and although, paradoxically, we are part of this universe, we position ourselves in opposition to it.[14] This leads to a fundamental disjunction of subject and object in Western science. We locate ourselves vis-à-vis Nature, the object of our search for knowledge, 'the knower as fundamentally separated from the known, and the known as an autonomous "object" that can be controlled through dispassionate, impersonal, "hand and brain" manipulations and measures' (Harding 1998: 364).

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[12] Taking into account the complexity of the subject-matter, the model that I design here is only one of the many ways in which 'modern science' can be defined. I do not pretend to present a universally valid model. But, as I will show, it is a model that takes us beyond mere financial-economic parameters, in the search for an explanation of the problems that universities in Africa experience.

[13] This parallel track has sometimes been interpreted in terms of conflict (recalling the Galileo-case) and sometimes in terms of co-operation (see e.g. the Merton-thesis which connects the development of science with puritan ethics). Drees pointed out that we are dealing here with a complexity and diversity in the way the two domains cohere, that cannot be defined unambiguously as either conflict or co-operation (Drees 1996:89-91).

[14] As Sökefeld said: 'The self thus became subject in the dual sense of being subjected to the conditions of the world and, simultaneously, being the agent of knowing and doing in that world. The belief in this subject became the a priori for the possibility of knowing the world' (Sökefeld 1999: 417).

‘God’s creation’ is ‘objectified’. The universe is considered to be a text that can be decoded and read and therefore known. God revealed His will in nature and this enables us to decipher His will, through knowledge of nature. Heyd wrote:

> The purpose, meaning, and order of nature was not inherent but rather imposed on it from above by divine free will. God could be known only by His revealed will in Scripture or His revealed power in Creation, and only empirical investigation could uncover the laws of nature since they were freely imposed by God’s will, rather than logical or inherent in the order of things. [….] The empirical study of Nature did reveal God’s power and providence, however, and in this respect it assumed a soteriological role as a bridge toward the knowledge of transcendental reality. (Heyd 1988: 172)

The world began to be seen as regularly patterned and therefore ‘knowable’, but at the same time contingent. Because it was patterned in an orderly fashion, the laws of nature could be discovered by means of rational investigation. However, ‘by conceiving the rational order of the universe as an expression of the will of a personal God, Christians added a new element to the way the universe was understood’ (Van den Bouwhuijsen 1996: 249). Nature was conceived as contingent and, therefore, open to a search for knowledge. Van den Bouwhuijsen referred to the words of the theologian Mascall who wrote in 1957:

> For empirical science to arise at all, there must be the belief – or at least the presumption - that the world is both contingent and regular. There must be regularities in the world, otherwise there will be nothing for science to discover; but they must be contingent, otherwise they … could be thought *a priori*. (cited by Van den Bouwhuijsen 1996: 217)

According to these viewpoints, we humans are in need of a clue from outside our world in order to be able to read the ‘world’ (and with that God’s Creation) as part of God’s assignment to humankind. Ancient Greek thinking accepted only the dichotomy ‘reason’ versus ‘unreason’. In opposition to this Greek notion, Christian thought formulated the concepts of necessity and contingency. Because it was held that God had revealed His message from outside His creation, outside the universe, knowledge of this creation was necessarily transcendental. In its secular mould, this transcendental knowledge was transformed into conceptual, theoretical knowledge. All other forms of knowledge were reduced to this dominant standard of the positivistic cosmology

of Western science. Western man became aware that God's revelation could be 'read'. But, at the same time, he struggled with an intrinsic uncertainty about the truth of this text. This led to, what Van den Bouwenhuijsen called:

> the 'knowledge-seeking' stance with a dynamic to produce continuously new and 'better' accounts of the world. (Van den Bouwenhuijsen 1996: 259-260)

Western science, defined in this manner, became a system of knowledge that was continuously, almost aggressively, searching for new theoretical knowledge.[15] In the words of the two African scholars, Mudimbe & Appiah (1993):

> But what is interesting about modern modes of theorizing is that they are organized around an image of constant change: we expect new theories; we reward and encourage the search for them; we believe that today's best theories will be revised beyond recognition if the enterprise of science survives. (Mudimbe & Appiah 1993: 131)

This system requires specific attributes in its participants and in the 'education' toward this particular scientific practice. Choudhuri, who characterised the practice of science as a 'calling', points to the need for a 'proper psychological gestalt' that became common property in the West, but was not necessarily universal. Choudhuri qualified Western science as 'total' (as opposed to the 'partial science' as practised in countries such as India).[16] Choudhuri considered this 'psychological gestalt' to be the result of the individual's integral process of learning in the West. At this point, he seemed implicitly to refer to the concept of a 'configuration of learning'. In his *The Heathen in his Blindness*, Balaganghadara considered the particular Western process of acquiring of knowledge as an

[15] A fine example of this paradigm is the work of the Utrecht Professor Gerard 't Hooft who received the Nobel Prize in 2000, together with his former tutor, Professor Veltman, for their joint work in the field of theoretical physics. In 1992, a book written by 't Hooft was published under the interesting title: *De bouwstenen van de schepping: Een zoektocht naar het allerkleinste* (English title *In search of the Ultimate Building blocks).* His book ended with the words: 'en zo ook is de Universele Vergelijking voor alle natuurverschijnselen thans het domein van de goden. Voor eeuwig? Wie zal het zeggen? [English translation: 'Similarly, this universal law for all natural phenomena is presently in divine hands. For how long? Who can tell?]' ('t Hooft 1993: 231). Drees referred to these problems as 'the questions which are left at the metaphorical ''last desk''' (Drees 1996: 18).

[16] According to Choudhuri, 'total science' exists when a number of conditions are met. An important condition is that: 'there are members of the community who are steadily making worthwhile research contributions to sciences'. There needs to be some kind of self-sustaining, structural academic tradition (Choudhuri 1985, passim).

intrinsic part of what he called a cultural ‘configuration of learning’. The process of learning and learning-how-to-learn is seen as a culturally determined phenomenon. There are different systems of learning, which sometimes interact. The configuration of learning most dominant in the West, is strongly connected to the Western religious system, in particular to Christianity: ‘religion constitutes a particular configuration of learning and meta-learning, in which all learning activities are subordinated to ‘‘theoretical learning’’ (Balagangadhara 1994). Science, originating within the Western religious system, was part of a culture-specific configuration of learning, and only gradually did it shed its local Western ties, in the interest of gaining global, hegemonic status.

In the West, science, in terms of ‘reading the Book of Nature’, was not only tolerated by religious communities and leaders (which, in the words of Heyd, resulted in ‘a negative autonomy’ for science) but it also concluded an alliance with them, based on the conviction that both shared one and the same ideal, the search for ultimate, soteriological knowledge. Heyd wrote:

> Since the study of the “Book of Nature” had soteriological significance, the autonomy of science had a positive meaning as well, providing an independent bridge to the knowledge of God, or at least God’s works. The investigation of nature became almost an act of worship, and the scientist a type of lay priest’. (Heyd 1988: 173)

And a ‘type of lay missionary’, I would add. Christianity had an inner drive to expand in terms of proselytising the heathen. For his own salvation, ‘the Other’ was ‘privileged’ to become a sharer in our knowledge of the universal revelation. In the same way, we view ‘the Other’ as ‘privileged’ in becoming a sharer in its secular alter ego, modern science, the latter being regarded as the apex of the system of knowledge. Western science stresses the paramount importance of the continuous search in ‘reading the Book of Nature’. This definition of science emanates from a fundamental analytical distinction between science and techne. I define techne as a modality of knowledge constantly mastered by human beings in order to be able to exist as a human species by making use of its environment and by protecting itself against the threats from that environment; technology as performal ‘know how’, a knowledge of means.[17] I define ‘Western’ science as a

[17] In this respect I refer again to Horton’s ‘intellectualist approach’ in which he postulated the existence of a universal rationality expressing itself, in particular, in technological knowledge which is universal and which can be reduced to the necessity of human beings to master and ‘make use’ of their environment (Horton 1993: 343).

teleological and 'theological' (be it in its secular version) 'know why'. The uniqueness of modern Western science is based on the combination of universal technological knowledge and the specific modern Western drive to read the 'Book of Nature', for domesticating Nature and reducing it to legibility.

The genesis of modern Western science dates back to the late Middle Ages, but its further development as ethno-knowledge en route to global hegemony was connected with the way the West spread its tentacles to the other parts of the world. In this respect, the year 1492 symbolised the climax of the European 'Voyages of Discovery'. Blaut rightly questioned a 'diffusionist' approach to the European route to hegemony. According to Blaut there was no 'European miracle', no development of modernity from the roots of a pre-1492 European civilisation. Instead, Europe profited from the influx of wealth from colonial accumulation after 1492, at the expense of other regions.[18] The same was also true of the domain of the development of knowledge. Sandra Harding contended that the world was transformed then into one big laboratory for European academics: 'the world was added as a laboratory to modern science in Europe through European expansion' (Harding 1989: 58)[19] In this process, 'the Other' was both object and partner. But this development of science through its present global hegemonic position, also led to a marginalisation of local systems of knowledge.[20] This specific Western ethno-knowledge system, i.e. the continuous search for theoretical knowledge, for making Nature, including its smallest particles, legible, also developed a specific cultural institutionalisation shape. As Huff described in full detail, it is also possible to define Western science in terms of a whole apparatus of institutional practices, practitioners and products.[21] He focused on the process of university institutionalisation in the 11th and 12th centuries. This institutional development distinguished the West from Islam and China. Science was increasingly organised into juridically autonomous entities that were safeguarded against the possible infringements of local and national authorities (both secular and religious). This institutionalisation dimension, which Huff called 'neutral zones', is of utmost importance.

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[18] See Blaut 1993.

[19] See in particular the chapter 'Voyages of Discovery' (Harding 1998: 39-54).

[20] Kimberley Pfeifer wrote in *Modernization and Indigenous Knowledge*: 'If Western science as an ethnoscience and science are the same, it seems that the evocation of science stems from a desire to privilege the "developed" in a set of power relations and legitimize its intervention into the affairs of the "underdeveloped"' (Pfeifer 1996, downloaded text).

[21] In his *The Rise of Early Modern Science: Islam, China and the West*, Huff offered a fascinating picture of the early development and institutionalisation of science in the West. See especially chapter 5, 'Colleges, Universities and Sciences'. (Huff 1993)

The purpose of these entities, universities, was 'to create objective, impersonal, and universal standards of intellectual achievement' (Huff 1993:169), amongst others, by developing a curriculum and a standard.[22] The impact of the institutionalisation of universities from the 11th and 12th centuries onwards, caused Grant to conclude: 'In retrospect, it is evident that no institution produced in the European Middle Ages has proven more permanent than the university' (Grant 1996: 38).

This process of institution-building, grounded on legal principles that were current in the Middle Ages, related not only to the institute of the university itself, but also to the institutionalisation in society of the values embodied by universities and science, as practised within the walls of these institutions.

The practice of science was boosted by the proliferation of writing on the 'Book of Nature'. The invention of printing presses by which texts could be spread on a much larger scale, had a major uniformising impact on these institutionalisation processes. The use of printing presses, enabled knowledge to be accumulated and disseminated in a much more efficient way than in purely oral societies.[23] I will come back to the theme of a 'writing' culture versus an oral tradition when I briefly touch upon the role of language and oral tradition in Africa.

If we talk about 'universities', we should of course bear in mind that these institutions, although seemingly very stable, have gone through different phases of development. There is no one-to-one development between the growth of universities and the practice of science. The universities of the late Middle Ages were unions in which the masters taught their students in an international setting. During the period of the Renaissance and the subsequent period of the Enlightenment, the development of science, in terms of research, took place largely outside the universities in the so-called (royal) academies and learned societies. The 19th century university was much more nationally oriented. Increasingly, it combined student education and transfer of knowledge in addition to value-free, positivist, research placed at the service of 'Progress'. This type of university carried on into the 20th century, although it came under severe pressure as a result of the massification of education after 1950. Increasingly, the national orientation and national anchoring of universities, are currently being questioned,

[22] Huff (1993) contrasted this institutionalisation in the shape of universities with the Madrasa, Islamic colleges, that were much more geared toward preserving knowledge within the epistemological boundaries of the Quran. The process of learning at the Madrasa was characterised by Huff as 'memorisation'. Huff regarded the Islamic hospitals and observatories as 'proto-scientific' institutions.

[23] See e.g. Elizabeth L. Eisenstein 1997.

the two concepts posing new questions about the legitimisation of the universities.

The Western academic discourse, with it own specific epistemological and institutional apparatus, finally acquired such a dominant position in the late-colonial and post-colonial era that other systems of knowledge are being reduced to it. The institutionalisation of this specific discourse became an intrinsic part of the West's (neo)-colonial enterprise. The missionary enterprise in Africa, emanating from God's mandate to believers, and by which all other systems of belief had to be reduced to this dominant Christian religion, was followed by the 'academisation' of Africa, arising from the mandate given to modern man (i.e. autonomous, rational, and secularised). Universities were established throughout the globe as extensions of their European counterparts, and served as such as extensions of the Western, European epistemological order, to which other systems of knowledge were expected to comply. The *Praeparatio evangelica* was followed by a *Praeparatio epistemica* that converged in a *Praeparatio universalis*. A particular local system of belief and knowledge (and of acquiring knowledge), had been elevated to a universal standard that had to be followed on penalty of marginalisation.

But if 'academia', as I have defined it, carries in it a culturally determined and determining component, then it is relevant to identify the variations between different configurations of learning. We need then to analyse the positions which these configurations and their institutional apparatuses adopt towards each other, in order to analyse the effects of their interaction, and to link them to processes of dominance and subordination. One of those effects is the process of alienation, dependency and opposition, and it will bring us to Africa.

Part II 'Academia' in Africa: following the track back

Education, the process of transferring knowledge, is not a Western invention. Education has always been an inherent component of societies all over the world, including Africa. Before the colonial period, education was mostly informally structured in relatively small communities of (extended) families and villages and 'early state' political systems of Africa. A child's first teaching experiences took place within its own small domestic circle, e.g. in the mother-and-child relationship. Later in life, the child was educated in the practice of a profession by the master himself, the system of apprenticeship. Structured systems of education were part of rites of passage from childhood to adulthood in some African societies.

Knowledge and wisdom, elements by which cultural and social capital were transferred to new generations, have always been present in African cultures. In

pre-colonial times, education was conducted in indigenous languages. The 'educational institution' was a school 'unenclosed by walls. The school, in effect, was coterminous with the village' (Ki-Zerbo 1990: 15).

Akinnaso warned against the frequently-used dichotomy of a pre-literate society with informal education *versus* a literate society with formal education. He pointed out that in Africa elaborate systems of formal education existed prior to the colonial period, and mentioned, as an example, the divination processes amongst the Yoruba.[24]

Although one should keep this warning in mind, the colonial period did introduce a new phenomenon. Western formal structures of education, based on reading and writing, were imported into Africa and introduced to the local populations. This education took place initially within the framework of the mission activities. This more or less formal training, was aimed at moulding the local population into a shape acceptable to the colonial authorities, and was focused largely on vocational aspects.[25] Colonial languages were introduced, step by step.

A major impetus to the further development of education in Africa originated from the work of the so-called Phelps-Stokes Commission that published two voluminous reports in 1922 and 1924, on the subject of education in Africa.[26] These reports had an enormous impact. They formulated a powerful critique of British colonial educational policy, which, according to the commission, was aimed solely at conversion to Christianity and to the production of a lower echelon of colonial civil servants. Apollos O. Nwauwa (1996) convincingly documented the integration of this education policy into the policy of Indirect Rule which did nothing to provide training facilities for the higher echelon of local intellectual leaders. The British policy of Indirect Rule was passive and restrained, and it was the Phelps-Stokes report that played a major role in activating British colonial educational policy. The British also feared that the potential local intelligentsia might depart for America in order to receive their education there, thus taking them further and further away from the British sphere of influence. Towards the very end of the colonial era, this more active policy also resulted into the beginning of higher education in Africa.

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[24] See Akinasso 1997 *passim*.

[25] This also relates to the fact that the early missionaries from Europe came from the lower social classes and had had little or no intellectual education themselves.

[26] In 1922, *Education in Africa* and in 1924 *Education in East Africa* were published. The Phelps-Stokes commission was financed by the American Phelps-Stokes Foundation and was chaired by educationalist Thomas Jesse Jones. One of its members, J.E.K. Aggrey, came from Africa, namely from what was then known as the Gold Coast (now Ghana).

Before the colonial period, 'higher education'[27] in Africa aimed at the training of religious and secular leaders. There was virtually no distinction between secular and religious knowledge in the informal system of higher education, prior to the colonial period.

> The system of higher education remained predominantly oral, eclectic and even esoteric. There was keen observation, collation and analysis of the properties of things. But its epistemology placed emphasis not so much on rationality as on the deeper meaning and the power of words, particularly the names of things. (Ajayi et al.1996: 4)

Those who carried this knowledge, including diviners, healers, and griots, were held in high esteem in local societies, and served as political commentators, critics, educators and mediators between the authorities and those subject to them.

A restricted number of Africans did receive a formal academic training in Europe or America after the second half of the 19th century. Two names in particular come to mind in this group, the first being James Africanus Horton (1835-1883) who received his academic training at King's College in London and later at the University of Edinburgh.[28] Horton pleaded strongly in favour of developing the Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone into a West-African university. Fourah Bay College was established in 1826 by the Church Missionary Society, in order to train local cadre for its missionary work in Africa. Horton placed his hope in the role that England, as the imperial power, was supposed to play in safeguarding the progress of civilisation in Africa. According to Boele van Hensbroek, Horton has been wrongly portrayed as merely a typical 'Black Englishman' (Boele van Hensbroek n.d.: 43)

At a later time, Edward Wilmot Blyden (1832-1912) followed Horton's track by also pleading for a system of higher education in Africa. Blyden was born in the Dutch West Indies and sent to be educated in the United States. When he was refused entrance to Rutgers University, he migrated to Liberia, and was one of the founding fathers of the concept of a Pan-Negroïsm, which advocated that all black people, all over the world should unite because they shared both colour and race. Blyden strongly emphasised that blacks have their own identity. Boele van

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[27] The use of the term 'higher education' is ambiguous in this context. It should be seen as an anachronistic terminology.

[28] Horton had received medical training. The British government wanted a number of African students to have a medical education and training in order to replace some of the British doctors working in the interior in Africa. They assumed that African doctors would better adapt physically to the harsh tropical climate (Nwauwa 1996: 3).

Hensbroek located him in a 'discourse of African regeneration'.[29] In an exchange of letters with John Pope Hennessey, Acting Governor in Sierra Leone, Blyden advocated the establishment of a university in West-Africa; a university linked to African tradition and focused on African languages. The discussions about the establishment of universities were continued by Casely Hayford in his *Ethiopia Unbound*[30] of 1911 and by Nmamdi Azikiwe in his *Renascent Africa* of 1937[31], but nothing materialised from them. The British colonial authorities stayed aloof from the African call for higher education.

It was only after the Phelps-Stokes reports, and especially the developments in British colonial administration by which Indirect Rule gradually lost its prominent position and the colonies became increasingly more articulate in their leanings towards independence, that more attention was paid to the development of higher education in Africa itself. This came, undoubtedly, from an emancipating elite in Africa. At the same time, however, the colonial powers saw higher education more and more as a means of maintaining their hold on this elite, by educating them in the Western intellectual traditions of Western universities.

For quite some time, Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone was the only educational institution in colonial Africa, offering elements of higher education. The College was established in 1832, and in 1876 had acquired an affiliation with Durham University,[32] the third university in England after Oxford and Cambridge. In East Africa, the Makerere Government College was established in 1921, and began offering higher technical education, albeit at a very modest level, from 1926 onwards.

It was not until after 1945 that the breakthrough to higher education in those parts of Africa under British rule finally came about. In a way, the Second World War played a decisive role in this. A major element in the development of the Western concept of higher education in Africa was derived from the Asquith report, published in 1945. The report outlined the foundation of higher education in the British colonies in Africa, as conceptualised by British academics and administrators.[33] The political change in British colonial thinking from Indirect

[29] See Pieter Boele van Hensbroek, *African Political Philosophy, 1860-1995: An inquiry into three families of discourse*, Groningen 1998.

[30] In *Ethiopia Unbound*, Casely Hayford, himself a graduate of Fourah Bay, pleaded for a Fante university 'teaching in Fante and making the development of African languages and cultures its major area of concern' (Ajayi *et al.*. 1996: 31).

[31] In this *Renascent Africa*, Azikiwe talked about 'an indigenous university sustained through African initiative' (Ajayi *et al.* 1996: 76).

[32] The Church Missionary Society had turned down an affiliation with the University of London, because it regarded it as a 'godless University' (Nwauwa 1997: 26).

[33] Nwauwa observed with regard to the composition of the Asquith commission: 'Apart from

Rule to 'self-government' of what were soon to be the 'former colonies' resulted in higher education becoming a high priority on the colonial agenda. Oliver Stanley, who headed the Colonial Office from 1942 onwards, clearly saw university education as 'one of the most important questions in connection with the post-war reconstruction and the development of the Colonial Empire'.[34] The Asquith report (and in its train the Elliott-report that contained recommendations for West-Africa specifically) pleaded strongly in favour of the development of a system of universities in the colonies that would produce a local intellectual cadre qualified to serve within the framework of the concept of self-government. The Asquith report noted that the colonial education policy had been focused too much on vocational training. It gave the University of London a central position in a system of relations with the colonial universities to be, this university was already training people from Africa through its External Degree programme. Its role was now to act as the university-mother, maintaining the academic standard up to the point at which its colonial 'children' would come of age as fully-fledged, degree-awarding universities.

At the same time, the Asquith report proposed the establishment of an Inter-university Council in which the colleges in the colonies would work together with the British universities, the leading part in that council being played by the University of London. Makerere University was identified as the institution that would develop into a central university for East Africa. Nwauwa concluded:

> With the appointment of the IUC and the arrangement with the University of London to sponsor university colleges in the colonies, the stage was set for the development of the British university system in the colonies. Thus, paradoxically, in an attempt to develop institutions essential for 'self-government', a kind of imperial framework of control was imposed. (Nwauwa 1997: 158)

In 1966 Ashby was already commenting that:

> The Asquith Report was despite its sincerity to provide for the best interests of the Colonies, a document of cultural imperialism, promoting Universities in Africa very largely according to the accepted British pattern in terms of academic standards, costs, teaching methods, the narrow range of subjects and the facilities for top level

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Haily and Cameron, who were career administrators, the rest of the members of the Commission were British academics. Interestingly, *there was no clergy in the Commission, the first time that the missionary interests were ignored in such a colonial body'* (italics are mine) (Nwauwa 1997: 166 ftn 21).

[34] cited by Nwauwa 1997: 134.

research. (Ashby 1966: 212-213)

The majority of the Elliott-committee advised the development of a university college in Ibadan, Nigeria and in Achimota in the Gold Coast, and, at a later date, the promotion of Fourah Bay to the status of University College. Referring to the Asquith and Elliot reports, Nwauwa concluded 'and hence the stage was perfectly set for British "university imperialism" in Africa' (Nwauwa 1997: 165).[35] Ngugi understandably speaks about the 'Horton-Asquith model' being the colonial model as opposed to the 'Blyden-Hayford-model' that would have linked up better with the local traditions and local languages. Ngugi writes:

> Thus the Horton-Asquith model had a whole colonial tradition and theory behind it and it was the model which was inherited almost unaltered in the era of independence. (Ngugi 2000: 5)

Soon after the Asquith-recommendations were accepted, the first so-called 'Asquith-Colleges' were established, to wit the University College of Ibadan and Khartoum University College in 1947, the University College at Achimota (Gold Coast, now Ghana) in 1948, and Makerere University College in 1949.[36]

The French colonial educational policy differed substantially from the British one, in that it was emphatically anti-clerical and refused to entrust the educational system to the missions. The key purpose of education was first and foremost the spread of a secular French culture. The apex of this system was that higher education should preferably be followed in Paris where students could join the evolués. French policy underwent a considerable shift in emphasis, however, in the wake of World War II. From the end of the war until the 1960s, universities were established in the former French colonies as extensions and replicas of French universities. The universities of Paris, Bordeaux and Aix-Marseilles were responsible for the Institutes of Higher Studies in Tunis, Dakar, Tananarive,

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[35] The eminent African scholar, professor Ali A. Mazrui, wrote in 1978: 'The stage was set for a significant new level of intellectual penetration by the West into African cultures' (Mazrui 1978: 290).

[36] Pierre L. van den Berghe recorded a paradigmatic 'colonial origin myth' pertaining to one of those colleges. He quoted L.B. Macaulay: 'At 5:30 p.m. on 28 December 1946 Sir William Hamilton Fyfe, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Aberdeen and leader of a delegation sent by the Inter-University Council for Higher Education in the Colonies, pushed his way through the undergrowth into the 'bush' a few miles north of the town of Ilosho in Nigeria until he reached a clearing where it was possible to see a few yards ahead. He planted his walking-stick firmly into the ground and said: "Here shall be the University of Nigeria"' (Van den Berghe 1973: 16).

Abidjan and Brazzaville. Some of these institutes were granted university status in the 1950s and 1960s. The idea of integration, and of the assimilation of a dominant French pattern of cultural values and norms shaped the contours of French colonial educational policy.

In Southern Africa, a University College was established in Salisbury in 1953 at the instance of white settlers who were looking for opportunities to provide higher education for their children. This was followed in 1955 by the foundation of the University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland.

Higher education in South Africa followed its own idiosyncratic development under the yoke of the apartheid-ideology. Apartheid shaped a system of education along ethnic lines with English-speaking universities such as the University of Cape Town, Afrikaner universities such as Stellenbosch and Pretoria, and the 'ethnic' universities such as the University of the North for the Sotho-Tsonga and Venda, the University of Zululand for the Zulu, the University of the Western Cape for the coloured, the University of Durban-Westville for the Asians, and the old University of Fort Hare for the Xhosa. These 'ethnic' or 'bush colleges' remained for a long time under the control of the Minister of Bantu Education. All students were rewarded their degrees and certificates by UNISA, the University of South Africa, a practice very reminiscent of the imperial system applied by the University of London with its Asquith Colleges. Slowly but surely, however, a neo-colonial system of higher education began to unfold in the former African colonies.

The African authors [all three former Vice-Chancellors of African universities, HvR] of *The African Experience with Higher Education,* concluded that the development of higher education in Africa was stimulated in particular by governments. 'As such, the University Colleges were viewed as aid or technical assistance from the colonial powers' (Ajayi *et al.* 1996: 69). The authors identified two major characteristics of these colonial institutions: 'the search for equivalence with European university standards and the attendant control of both curriculum and personnel by the colonial authorities acting in partnership with the metropolitan universities' (Ajayi *et al.* 1996: 67).[37] Mazrui observed the enforcement of yet another element, namely that: '[…] the new colonial universities imported the same contempt for practical subjects that had

[37] Ali Mazrui, who worked as a political scientist at Makerere University, recalled the extent of this 'supervision' by the University of London especially. Colleagues at this colonial sister-university interfered even at the level of the academic tests, certainly in the time that Mazrui was teaching Marxism (Mazrui 1978:290). Sir Walter Adams, principal of the University of Rhodesia referred to the University of London as *'the imperial Mother of universities'* (quoted in Chideya 1979: 8).

characterised the academic ethos of the West for centuries' (Mazrui 1992: 98). According to Mazrui this 'new post-war policy of "universities for the colonies" partially diluted an earlier imperial commitment to vocational and practical training' (Mazrui 1992: 98).

In the early period after the various states in Africa had won their independence, these institutions became the objects of the process of Africanisation, i.e. the appropriation of these, in origin colonial, exogenous[38] institutions. The universities were supposed to play a central role in the post-colonial planning for the development and modernising process in Africa. Post-colonial policy was hardly concerned with 'the university in Africa' but all the more with 'the African university', which was characterised as a 'development university'. During a workshop on *'Creating the African University: Emerging Issues of the 70's',* organised in 1972, this concept of the 'development university' was central. In the words of Yesufu (who edited the proceedings of the workshop[39]:

> [….] the emergent African university must, henceforth, be much more than an institution for teaching, research and dissemination of higher learning. It must be accountable to, and serve, the vast majority of the people who live in rural areas. The African University must be committed to active participation in social transformation, economic modernization, and the training and upgrading of the total human resources of the nation, not just of a small elite. (Yesufu 1973: 41-42)

In this first phase, which ran until the early 1980s, 'development' was conceptualised on the basis of the concept of Africanisation and emancipation. The quest for African identity marked the thinking about, and within, African universities.[40] We have seen the same quest in the domain of religion, in which

[38] Brown Sherman said: 'The African university is a product of the modern world, yet, the environment which inherited it is largely traditional, preindustrial, and agrarian. [….] A product of the Western world, the African university was born a stranger to its own environment and its main links were with institutions that were strangers to this environment and with the countries to which those universities belong' (Sherman: 1990: 371).

[39] Cf. Yesufu 1973. This workshop led Wandira to characterise the development of universities in Africa as a sequence ranging from the *Jones*-Colleges (a reference to the Phelps-Stokes publications) to the *Asquith*-Colleges and from there to the *Yesufu*-Colleges (Wandira 1977, *passim*).

[40] Ajayi spoke in 1971 in his article *African Universities and the African Tradition* about a 'crisis of identity' caused by the discontinuity brought about by the colonial period. According to Ajayi, universities were expected to take the lead in finding a way out in this identity crisis in order 'to reconcile innovation with African tradition'. But at the same time, he came to the conclusion that the universities themselves were also victims of this crisis of

African theologians, including John S. Mbiti and E. Bolaji Idowu, tried to develop a Pan-African religion, as an alternative to the dominant Western, i.e. Christian, model. It was certainly more than sheer coincidence that the book, edited by Yesufu, *Creating the African University,* was published in the same year that saw the publication of Idowu's *African Traditional Religion: A Definition*, in which Idowu tried to define African religion (in the singular).

From the 1980s onwards, the model of development was increasingly defined in terms of the function of the universities in providing the necessary stimulus for the social and economic development of Africa. This conception was evidentd in many World Bank analyses of African universities and the role they were supposed to play. This was also the period, however, in which people talked about the crisis of the universities in Africa, and primarily perceived as emanating from the macro-economic crisis raging throughout Africa.

I have shown in this section that higher education was on the agenda of a restricted number of African intellectuals as early as the 19th century. The colonial authorities were unwilling to meet these demands until they realised the need for a local intellectual cadre, a cadre educated within the confines of a colonial higher education system. In the wake of independence we see that attempts were being made to appropriate this colonial legacy in order to develop the African university. We see at the same time, however, that the introduction of the 'Horton-Asquith' universities-model evoked reactions of alienation, dependence, and opposition.

Part III: Academia in Africa: traces of alienation, dependency and opposition

In Part I, I sketched the contours of a model of a Western institutionalised epistemological system and in Part II its hegemonic institutionalisation, in particular in the periphery of the colonial metropolis (or should I say in the metropolises of the colonial peripheries?) of Africa. I now want to highlight the reactions in Africa to this colonial enterprise. There has always been opposition to this dominant colonial discourse in Africa, and in this respect there is a revealing analogy with the process of institutionalisation of the Western religious-missionary discourse in Africa during colonial times.

Inversion

In the transition from the colonial to the post-colonial period, the *Negritude* movement adopted mostly Western norms and values, which had became internalised through education, both academic and cultural. In many cases,

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identity (Ajayi 1971:5). See also his contribution *Towards an African Academic Community* in Yesufu 1973.

students received this education in the metropolis, notably Paris.[41] This *Negritude* movement can be characterised as a nativistic one which tried to mirror the Western discourse and pattern of norms and values with the essentialist counter-image of 'being African'.[42] The characteristic property of 'African personality' was articulated in terms of a Western discourse and ultimately intended for a Western audience. From this essentialist concept of 'African personality', a dichotomy was created between ratio and emotion, and it also had an epistemological dimension.

> In short, Negro-African epistemology starts from the premise, 'I feel, therefore I am'. (Mazrui 1978: 86)

It is not without reason that Senghor, the leading intellectual of the Negritude-movement, characterised Descartes as 'The European par excellence' (Mazrui 1978: 100, ftn). The cool, reasoning, calculating, Western person against the African human being 'in tune with the rhythms of the cosmos' (Jeyifo Biodun 2000: downloaded text). African 'essence' as an inversion of a Western dominant norm.[43] Taking the concept of the 'African personality' as a starting point, Western colonial dominance gave rise to processes of alienation, in particular in the area of formal education. We can see Negritude as a movement in which Western epistemological assumptions, that had found their ultimate expression in modern Western universities, were contrasted with the primacy of emotion, intuition, and participation, inherent in the African human being.

The Ugandan writer, academic, poet, Okot p'Bitek, developed this element of alienation further into a fundamental critique of the colonial dominance in 'academia'. Okot p'Bitek delivered a speech in Zambia in 1967 which he later incorporated into his *Africa's Cultural Revolution* under the title *Indigenous Social Ills*. In his speech, Okot formulated a 'razor-sharp' analysis of the alienation which resulted from the colonial educational system. With the provocative slogan 'Uneducated people of Africa, unite!', Okot presented a

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[41] Mazrui characterised Senghor, one of the leaders of the Negritude movement, as follows: 'By objective criteria President Senghor is one of the most deeply westernized of all African intellectuals. In many ways he is indeed a black Frenchman' (Mazrui 1978: 13).

[42] See also Said 1994: 275-280.

[43] Senghor drew an analogy between 'Western Woman's conditions and the Black African's in the world': 'What seems less evident, is the similarity between the Woman's virtues and the virtues of the Black. […] There is, above all, in the Black, as well as in the Woman, the power of emotion and, thus, of identification' (cited in Schipper 1999: 124). I will come back to this concept of an analogy between an African worldview and essentialist opinions about the alleged worldview of 'women'.

revealing view of this process of alienation:

> And those who score the highest awards in the examination enter the University - the final stage in the professional training and cultural destruction of our rulers. By now he is virtually ignorant and ashamed of the ideas and the practices of his people, and completely confused about the culture of his civilizers. [….]
>
> At the end of the third year he dons his black gown and flat-topped cap. In his hand he carries the piece of paper they give him at graduation - the key to power, money and a big car. Over-dressed in his dark suit he walks out of the University gate, out into the world, materially comfortable, but culturally castrated, dead. (Okot p'Bitek 1973: 13)

Okot pictured this alienation even more strongly and sharply in the words of Lawino:

Bile burns my inside!
I feel like vomiting!
For all our young men
Were finished in the forest,
Their manhood was finished
In the class-rooms,
Their testicles
Were smashed
With large books.
(Okot p'Bitek 1984: 117)

Okot formulated this critique of an imported Western system of knowledge which was literally *pre-scribed* for a minority of the local population and through which their identity was being distorted; it was this that provoked his most pressing advice: 'Wipe the blackboard clean, so that we may draw a true and vivid picture of African deities, rituals and beliefs' (Okot p'Bitek 1973: 90).

At the same time, Okot showed that the local elites were never really accepted by the Western metropolis and that it was this that produced the double-edged alienation.

> A lost victim of his own people, he cannot dance the dance or play the music of his own people, but neither can he deeply and sincerely enjoy the foreign art forms. (Okot p'Bitek 1973: 13)

Okot blamed this on the Western system of education, as practised at the young universities such as Makerere, a system deeply foreign to African culture. To Okot, the university was the apex of a pyramidal, alienating educational structure. The participants in this university were being alienated from their own community, and even worse: 'Our universities and schools are nests in which black exploiters are hatched and bred […]' (Okot 1973: 8).

From inversion to extraversion

Further down the road of alienation, lies the dependence syndrome, both at a cognitive and at an institutional level. Two eminent African academics dealt specifically with this relationship of dependence in the'academia' domain.

In a number of publications, the Beninese philosopher Paulin Hountondji identified the dependence relations, as they gradually developed between the West and Africa in the field of academic practice.[44] He defined this system of dependence in terms of a division of working relations between the metropolis and the periphery. The concept of 'extraversion' was central in his analysis[45], and he compared it to the economic extraction of raw materials from Third World countries, which were then processed in Western countries, the metropolis, into finished products and subsequently found their way back again to the markets of Africa. According to Hountondji, a similar system was also at work in the field of science, raw materials being extracted from the periphery in order to be processed into scientific theories and conceptual knowledge in the metropolis, and exported back to the periphery. This resulted in what Hountondji called the 'extraversion' of African academics who turned their backs on their local environment and kept their eyes focused on the academic metropolis in the North. In many cases, this process of extraversion was finalised in the phenomenon of the brain-drain. At the same time, this extraversion resulted in a further marginalisation of local systems of knowledge:

> Peripheral to science in the metropolis, institutionalised research in Africa entails in its turn a further push of endogenous elements of knowledge to the periphery, thus relegating these to the periphery of the periphery, as mere survivals, intellectual and technological curiosities and lifeless, inert cultural objects, only fit for exhibition in museums for the titillation of antiquaries and other lovers of exorcism. (Hountondji 1997: 13-14)

[44] See in particular Hountondji 1990, 1992, 1994 en 1997.
[45] He interchanged the terms 'extroversion' and 'extraversion'.

Hountondji pointed to the more limited counterpart of the South-to-North brain-drain, i.e. the academic travelling from the North to the South. However, 'he is not going to look there for his paradigms, his theoretical and methodological models,…[..]' (Hountondji 1992: 247). Hountondji finally touched on the use of academic languages imported from the North.

In his article 'Displaced Academics and the Quest for a New World Academic Order', Kwesi Yankah continued along Hountondji's track by asking that attention be paid to the operation of an 'international academic order', in particular the practice of publishing. He stated emphatically that there seemed to be a strong dominance of Northern publishers in this domain, who systematically marginalised the input of African academics in the leading, i.e. Western, academic journals.

In his *Political Values and the Educated Class in Africa* (1978), Ali Mazrui was already occupied with the theme of dependence in the academia field, and it was a recurrent theme in many of his later publications.[46] He pointed out the close relationship that existed between religious and secular evangelism, between 'church' and 'school' as 'major agencies of intrusion' (Mazrui 1978: 287). The cultural dependence that Mazrui saw unfolding, found its 'pinnacle' in the university as it had been established by the colonial governments of Africa: 'In the cultural domain, the pinnacle of the structure of dependency was the university […]' (Mazrui 1978: 287). Like Hountondji, he perceived a parallel with economic dependence in his discussion of 'cultural import-substitution'. It resulted, said Mazrui, in a 'dependency-syndrome', and in this respect he made a reference to Okot p'Bitek's denouncement of the 'dual dependency' as:

> The worst form of dependency is indeed the dual dependency that blames all misfortunes on external forces and seeks all solutions from outside. (Mazrui 1978: 304)[47]

Mazrui localised this dependency syndrome specifically in the area of academia:

[46] See e.g. Ali Mazrui 1992.

[47] Okot wrote in his *Indigenous ills*: 'Another, but contradictory phenomenon is the belief that the solution to our social ills can be imported. Foreign 'experts' and peace-corps swarm the country like white ants. Economic 'advisers', military 'advisers' and security 'advisers' surround our leaders' (Okot p'Bitek 1973: 47).

> Since the university was so uncompromisingly foreign in an African context, and was transplanted with few concessions to African cultures, its impact was more culturally alienating than it need have been.
>
> The ghost of intellectual dependency continues to haunt the whole gamut of Africa's academia for the time being. [.....] African intellectuals had already become so mentally dependent that they themselves insisted on considerable imitation of Western educational systems. (Mazrui 1992: 100-101)

Although he drew the gloomy conclusion that the 'African university is part of a chain of dependency that continues to tie Africa to the Western world', Mazrui nonetheless perceived at the same time a 'tension between its [the Western world's, HvR] ambition to promote genuine development in Africa and its continuing role in the consolidation of cultural dependency' (Mazrui 1992: 104-105).

Hountondji and Ali Mazrui disclose to us a movement that has been described as 'decolonising the mind'; a movement the purpose of which was to end the relationship of dependency. Its goal was to set African scholars free from the 'mental chains' of a Western dominant discourse, also in academia.[48] Africanising by means of decolonising literature became the spearhead at the young African universities, such as Makerere University. But as Hountondji also said, in other domains of academia too, people were looking for Africanisation: 'we no longer study sociology, but 'African sociology', or even 'ethnology'; no longer history, but African history, instead of geography, African geography, instead of linguistics, African linguistics'. Hountondji noted that this drive to Africanise carried with it the danger of 'theoretical imprisonment' (Hountondji 1996[2]: 168).

It did not come as a surprise that the ideologies behind the programme aimed at de-colonising the minds of Africans, focused on language, given that most of the trend-setters were writers. The Kenyan writer Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, for instance, together with Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka, played an important role in this respect. Ngugi pointed out that the Western discourse had its own language, which literally but also conceptually, resulted in alienation and distortion for people coming from different configurations of learning.[49] As I indicated earlier, Ngugi regarded the focus on African languages in higher

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[48] See e.g. Mugomba & Nyaggah (eds.) 1980, and Chideya 1979.

[49] A contemporary current continuing of the decolonising-the-mind-programme, is what is termed 'Afrocentrism' (logically coupled to criticism of 'Eurocentrism'). One finds this still current today especially among Afro-American academics, lecturing in American universities.

education as a crucial criterion for discerning between the Horton-Asquith-university and the Blyden-Hayford-model.

Ngugi recently made another interesting contribution to this debate by distinguishing three types of 'African interpreters'.[50] Language was the distinguishing criterion in this classification. His first type was 'the interpreter as foreign agent', found for instance in the 19th century assisting the West in its colonising project: 'He helps in the conquest of the interior, in mapping out and classifying every corner and resource, and later in the actual administration'.[51] The second was 'the interpreter as double agent', and here Ngugi included the Negritude-movement. For Ngugi, language was again the crucial factor. European languages were the dominant vehicle for the 'double agent', and in the end it prevented him from communicating with his own people. As an example, Ngugi referred to the portrayal by Okot p'Bitek of the estrangement between Lawino and Ochol, when Ochol denounced Lawino's native Acholi-language.[52] Ngugi perceived severe consequences for the development of science and technology arising from the manner in which these double agents operated:

> At the level of economics, science, and technology, Africa will keep on talking about transfer of technology from the West. There are countless resolutions about this in regional, continental, and international conferences. Yet the African intellectual elite, with its episteme and techne, refuses to transfer even the little it has already acquired into the languages of the majority. (Ngugi 1996: downloaded full text)

Ngugi also remarked that there was a mechanism at work here that continuously reinforced this dependence:

> Thus, whether they are merchants, academics, writers, or experts, they have no difficulties in talking to their counterparts at conferences and institutions from Tokyo to New York. And in all those fora, they see themselves as representing Africa, that

[50] See Ngugi wa Thiong'o 1996. This article is included in *Penpoints, Gunpoints and Dreams: Towards a Critical Theory of the Arts and the State in Africa*, published by Oxford University Press [Clarendon] in 1998.

[51] A classical, but above all tragic, example of an 'interpreter as foreign agent' was Jacobus E.J. Capitein (1717-1747) who came as a slave to the Netherlands, where he received a theological education at Leiden University. He wrote a dissertation there in which he argued that slavery was not contradictory to Christian freedom. He returned, ultimately, to Elmira (Ghana) where he was unable to integrate with his own people again, and died at early age. See Kpobi 1993.

[52] See the quote from Okot at the beginning of this article.

> is, Africa defined as being constituted of the same class of interpreters. (Ngugi 1996: downloaded full text)

Ngugi set his hopes on a third category, that of the 'interpreter as a scout and a guide' who writes and expresses in his own language, and builds on the oral tradition of the griot, 'the oral intellectual':

> Such intellectuals, whenever they will be born, will grow their roots in African languages and cultures. They will learn the best they can from all world languages and cultures. They will view themselves as scouts in foreign linguistic territories and guides in their own linguistic space. (Ngugi 1996: downloaded full text)

Much to his regret, Ngugi was forced to conclude that this category of intellectuals presented but a small minority.

The paradox, which Ngugi perceived himself, was the fact that these writers of the 'de-colonising the mind' programme became internationally renowned as a result of their being offered a place within the Western discourse: 'It is quite ironic that while one of the biggest achievements of the Horton-Asquith model was the production of an African literature in English, it was literature often motivated by the Blydenian vision of positive affirmation of the African image' (Ngugi 2000: 5). It may be that the net yield of the 'de-colonising-the-mind' movement was, in the end, nothing less than a reinforcement of the Western discourse.

Another problematic area, connected to the use of a colonial language with its inherently estranging effect, is that of the relation of orality versus literacy. Some Western academics postulated a connection between the absence of the written word in Africa and the alleged absence of conceptual-analytical thinking.[53] Hountondji, who denounced every reference to Lévy-Bruhl's 'primitive mentality'-concept, made an interesting distinction between 'writing tradition' aimed at 'criticising', and an 'oral tradition' aimed at 'preserving' (Hountondji 1996: 98-102 *passim*). According to Hountondji, an oral tradition was, in itself, a

[53] See e.g. Walter Ong's *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the World*, 1982 and Jack Goody's *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*, 1977. Stephen Tyler commented in his article *On Being Out of Words*: '[…] the discourse on orality and literacy resounds with the clash of two master tropes. One is the modernist trope of "loss and liberation", of "past surpassed"; the other of the post-modern trope of "resistance and recovery", of "the past recuperated" (Tyler 1992: 2-4). Interestingly, Tyler concluded that the hegemony of 'writing and literacy' is already under pressure in the West because of the 'futuristic possibilities of computerization' (Tyler 1992: 6).

hindrance to the development of a scientific tradition,.[54] This relationship between having a tradition of orality and not having a scientific tradition, is intimately connected to the problems of African universities generally. Its range and complexity, however, mean that I can touch only briefly on this area, it being one of the problem-areas adjacent to the development of African universities.

I have already referred to a number of eminent African intellectuals who had been particularly eloquent in criticising, in different manners and from different angles, the colonial project of 'academia in Africa'. Following the inversion of the Negritude, the extraversion of Hountondji, and the dependency-syndrome of Mazrui, we discussed the 'decolonising-the-mind' programme.[55] The critique surrounding the 'academia in Africa' project coincided with that of the hegemony of a Western conceptual system of knowledge in Africa. Useful clues for a better future for academia in Africa, however, were hidden in the articulation of their critique. I will touch on this subject in Part IV.

Part IV: Academia in Africa: its future track?

A growing number of publications pointed to a deep crisis in African universities from the early 1980s onwards. These publications noted a sharp rise in student-numbers in African universities which did not keep pace with the budget increases for higher education granted by the governments. On the contrary, in many instances budgets appeared to be decreasing. The relatively high costs of African universities, caused by the exceedingly high unit-costs per student, were increasingly questioned. A number of publications showed the deplorable research-infrastructure. African academics, working at African universities, contributed only marginally to academic publications in international journals.[56] Many academics found their way to European, and especially to American,

[54] 'It is difficult to imagine a scientific civilization that is not a civilization based on writing, difficult to imagine a scientific tradition in a society in which knowledge can be transmitted only orally. Therefore African civilizations could not give birth to any science, in the strictest sense of the word, until they had undergone the profound transformation through which we see them going today, that transformation which is gradually changing them, from within, into literate civilizations' (Hountondji 1996: 99).

[55] The themes of 'alienation', dependency, and extroversion were also addressed in an article by Abiola Irele, who wrote (1991: 64): '*Above all, the Western academy remains the unique source of validation for the African Scholar'. [....] we have no choice but to produce what is ultimately a derived discourse*. Everything in our situation thus conduces to the extroversion of African discourse, including that of scholarship. We can speak then with truth of a profound alienation of the African scholar' (Irele 1991: p. 64; my italics).

[56]See e.g. the material presented in Zymelman, Manuel 1990. In the *UNESCO Courier*, May 1999 editorial referred to 'Black Africa [as] a scientific desert'. Africa produces less than 1% of all scientific publications.

universities. The brain-drain was taking place at an alarming pace, and research in Africa itself was financed to a large extent by donor organisations.

Remedies to solve this crisis were sought primarily in increasing the financial resources, in generating other forms of income for the universities, in initiating strategic planning, in improving management, introducing ICT-systems and regulating student-intake. Donor organisations developed programmes in which American and European universities participated.

In the early 1970s, academics at Western universities were already beginning to realise that a gap was growing between the North and the South in terms of the distribution of knowledge. These universities made it their duty to assist universities in developing countries in their development process, as part of a global 'universitas'.[57] The potential negative effects of fundamental differences between the modern-Western and traditional-African epistemologies, were relegated in particular to the field of science education, with numerous books and articles focusing on the divide between these epistemologies, and on the inherent consequences for teaching programmes.

Co-operation programmes, aimed at reinforcing local universities, were always being evaluated according to the terms and criteria of Western academia, our 'gold standard',[58] and finally, of an implicit Western epistemology. The net result of this practice of university development co-operation, was the continuation of the dominance of the Western academic discourse as it was destined to become institutionalised in the universities in Africa.

In his article 'Doctrines of Science, Technology, and Development',[59] Ming Ivory dealt with what he called 'doctrines concerning the design of science policy assistance'. Ivory's purpose was to show:

> how deeply beliefs about the scientific nature of its own culture have coloured Western prescriptions for others. (Ivory 1998: downloaded full text)

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[57] Dutch universities organised the so-called *Utrecht-conference* in 1967 during which they pledged to assist partner-universities in developing countries in their development.

[58] The concept of the 'gold standard', meaning an 'academic gold standard', was formulated by Eric Ashby in 1964 in his *African Universities and the Western Tradition*. This is essentially the formulation of a British, imperial 'Oxbridge' standard. It was Ashby himself who questioned the adequacy of such a standard in the process of the Africanisation of the universities in Africa. See for a recent contextualisation of this concept in a South African setting, Sam C. Nolutshungu's article, *Beyond the Gold Standard?* (1999).

[59] Ivory 1998.

He distinguished four doctrines that were in force after World War II and which are still operative today. The first one is the *Lab-Bench doctrine*. Those who adhere to this doctrine regard the scientific community as an elite group that should avoid politics. Its epistemology assumes that science and its method are universal; institutes of higher education and research are thus also universal institutes. The remedies for developing countries, therefore, lie in the contacts they make with their colleagues in the West. It is the task of governments only to facilitate these links.

The second doctrine is what Ivory called the *Structuralist Doctrine*. This concept derives from the 'take off' theory of development prevalent in the 1950s, as devised by Walt Rostow. The main problem facing developing countries was perceived in terms of low productivity levels which needed to be raised by means of investment; this would result in an accumulation of capital which would then be used to stimulate further economic development. Science and technology was expected to make a real contribution to increased productivity. According to this doctrine, science and technology were insufficiently geared towards the market and played no role whatsoever in this economic field and marginalisation was the price they paid. According to the structuralists, the obvious remedy for this was the re-establishment of the link between science and technology and the productive sector, the industrial and agrarian sector in particular. We find this line of thought in a number of World Bank publications in the 1980s and 1990s on the subject of African universities prospects.[60]

The structuralists founded their ideas implicitly on the alleged antithesis of modern versus traditional societies. This meant that a change in the pattern of values and norms was going to be inevitable in the long run. 'Managing the transition' was their parole, and their epistemological framework resembled very closely that of the Lab-benchers. They also adhered to a positivistic scientific epistemology. To facilitate the transition from traditional to modern society, the structuralists put a high value on institutional relations between developing

[60] The major publications of the World Bank on higher education are:
- *Education in sub-Saharan Africa: Policies for Adjustment, Revitalization, and Expansion*. Washington D.C.: The World Bank (1988);
- Saint, William S, *Universities in Africa: Strategies for Stabilization and Revitalization.* World Bank Technical Paper number 194. Africa Technical Department Series (1991);
- *Higher Education: The Lessons of Experience*. Washington D.C.: World Bank (1994);
- *Revitalizing Universities in Africa: Strategy and Guidelines*. Prepared by Association of African Universities, the World Bank. Washington D.C.: World Bank (1997);
- *World Development Report 1998/99: Knowledge for Development*. New York: Oxford University Press (1998/1999);
- *Higher Education in Developing Countries: Peril and Promise* (2000).

countries and the Western hemisphere. Education played an important role and was seen as an indispensable asset in the whole modernisation process.

In the 1970s, the doctrines of both the Lab-bencher and the Structuralists came under fire from the adherents of the *Dependencia-doctrine*, in whose opinion the 'catching-up scenario' had utterly failed and the centre was exercising increasing domination over the periphery, also in the field of science & technology. Even worse, science and technology had developed into an instrument of the Western hegemonic ambition. An essential element in this hegemony was the link between the centre of the metropolis, and the elite in the periphery. This periphery was no monolith. Dependencia doctrine was hardly interested in the relation between knowledge and production, but focussed instead on that between knowledge and power. The remedy, therefore, was not to be sought in reinforcing the connection of knowledge to the market, but rather in the process of empowerment and ownership.

> They would change the North-South distribution of ownership by disengaging the financial contribution of the advanced countries from the decision making on its use- a shift largely unacceptable to assistance donors. (Ivory 1998: downloaded full text)

The Dependencia doctrine was ambivalent towards a close affiliation between developing countries and the West, because this would perpetuate the uneven relationship. 'Disengagement' was sometimes suggested as a serious strategy, in conjunction with an emphasis on more co-operation between the developing countries themselves. According to this Dependencia doctrine the problem of inequality was not found in the developing countries only. The rich countries needed to be part of the process of restructuring. In the Dependencia doctrine, focus on the role of local knowledge-systems, defined in terms of appropriate technology, was unmistakably greater than in the Lab-Bench and Structuralist doctrines. The Dependencia doctrine, however, was ambivalent in this respect and clearly had one foot in the Structuralist en Lab-Bench doctrines of the universality of science. Although the Dependencia doctrine seems to have been largely abandoned in the West, some of its elements were emphatically present in the criticisms of some African academics, Hountondji included.

In the fourth doctrine, distinguished by Ming Ivory as the *Cultural Compatibility*, the concept of the universality of science was questioned. This doctrine was to some degree connected with the growing disillusion with the negative effects of science en technology after the middle 1980s. People became increasingly aware that science and technology had resulted in excesses and in

threats to nature and the world. Even within the academic community itself, faith in science was decreasing. The Cultural Compatibility doctrine saw more clearly than the Dependencia doctrine, that an important role had to be played by endogenous systems of knowledge. These local knowledge systems were regarded as the foundation for further development of the technology infrastructure; a concept that was certainly not always supported by local scholars who maintained relations with the Western metropolises of the academic community because they had been educated in a Western academic tradition and belonged to a local elite. Central to the Cultural Compatibility doctrine was the concept that no system of knowledge is exclusive. Homogenisation along the lines of a Western epistemological system rather than diversity, would result in the loss of valuable local systems.

The present Western donor discourse on ‘development’ in respect of academia, seems to be largely based on a combination of the Lab-bench and Structuralist doctrines. This discourse requires African universities to develop as Western universities did, because in the final analysis, the concept of ‘the university’ is regarded as universal. And the programmes, dominated by the West, force African universities to run along the same track of our omnipotent ‘high modernity’ ideology, (Scott 1998) as formulated in mission statements, models of strategic planning, strategic management etc.[61] Western universities are ready to assist in this project of ‘development’, and there is no reason to rule out that they experience a sense of genuine altruism in consequence.

Scott, however, gave us a different and more elucidative perspective. In his *Seeing like a State (*subtitled*: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed)*, he asked the question: what went wrong with so many great state-initiated utopian social engineering schemes of the twentieth century? In this respect, he referred to different large scale programmes such as the introduction of scientific forestry, Nyerere’s Ujamaa-programme, and the project of planning the new capital of Brazil, Brasilia. Scott discerned four elements in these various social engineering projects. Firstly, there was an administrative ordering which led to a simplification of nature and society as a result of transforming and reducing a complex environment into tables, graphics, and maps etc.. As we saw earlier, Scott stressed the concept of the legibility of Nature and

[61] They seem to follow implicitly a classical Weberian concept of increasing instrumental rationalisation within complex organisations, and to assume that our own institutions are managed through a rational and transparent process of strategic planning. See also Farrant & Afonso (1997) in which they stated that, although the process of strategic planning followed by strategic management is imperative for African universities, the Northern models of planning and management are not always suitable to the local situations.

Society as a key element of modernist thinking. Secondly, there was a 'high-modernist ideology, a strong belief in scientific and technical progress':

> At its center was a supreme self-confidence about continued linear progress, the development of scientific and technical knowledge, the expansion of production, the rational design of social order, the growing satisfaction of human needs and, last but not least, an increasing control over nature (including human nature) commensurate with scientific understanding of natural laws. (Scott 1998: 89)

In this high-modernist thinking, society becomes an object of planning and social engineering, on the basis of scientifically designed schemes, which accordingly rule out 'superstition' and 'religious prejudice'.

Thirdly, Scott discerned the presence of an authoritarian state determined to embark on a programme of social engineering. Finally, there was a 'prostrate civil society that lacks the capacity to resist these plans' (Scott 1998: 4).

If one looks at the history of the establishment of universities in Africa, there is reason to classify it as one of Scott's 'utopian social engineering schemes'. The legibility-concept lay, no doubt, at the heart of the colonising programme, and the society of colonised peoples needed to be reduced to legibility. As we saw earlier, pioneer anthropologists were important accomplices in this endeavour. The element of high modernity is even more present in Western-colonial thinking about education, including higher education, in Africa. One could even argue that this notion of high modernity, as a belief, was 'blown up' in the scheme of university development in Africa, as conceptualised by the colonial powers in the Horton-Asquith-model they wanted to implant in Africa. And, of course, taking into account the colonial and neo-colonial situations, civil society in the periphery would never be able to halt this programme.

Coming back to the donor organisations and European and North American universities then, it could be asserted that they were (and still are), in fact, taking part in a secular mission-like utopian social engineering programme 'Academia in Africa'.

Scott argued that large-scale social engineering programmes did not achieve their systematically, but simplistically planned objectives because their 'imperial or hegemonic planning mentality [….] excluded the necessary role of local knowledge and know-how' (Scott 1998: 89). Scott used the term 'metis' for that domain of local knowledge which, in his view, related both to content and practice.[62] Metis, in Scott's words, represents 'a wide array of practical skills and

[62] As I have explained in the introduction to this thesis, I prefer to follow Marglin and use the

acquired intelligence in responding to a constantly changing natural and human environment' (Scott 1998: 424). By definition, metis is inseparable from experience and practice.

Scott's views on the failure of high-modernity-based utopian social engineering and the adjacent perspective of the cultural compatibility doctrine between the modern western and 'local' systems of knowledge, bring us to an intriguing analogy with past developments in the field of religion in Africa; an analogy that is not merely accidental but may give some indications for the future development of universities in Africa.

'The empire 'believes' back'!

The Christianisation of Africa (the Western message of salvation) resulted in the establishment of the so-called mainline (mission) churches on the African continent in which the Western Christian religion was institutionalised according to its many European denominations. These mainline churches, however, evoked counter-reactions in the shape of the African Independent Churches[63]; this is a movement that originated from, and linked up with, the needs of the local population, thereby constituting a hybridisation of African religious values and norms with Western Christian religion.[64] Central concepts within this multi-coloured palette of African Independent churches are healing, wholeness, community, participation and spirituality.[65] The phenomenon of African Independent Churches cannot be explained exclusively in terms of a reaction to

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term 'Techne' instead of Scott's 'metis'.

[63] The acronym AIC is used for different wordings: African Independent Churches, African Initiatives in Christianity, African Instituted Churches, African Indigenous Churches, or African International Churches (Ter Haar 1998: 4-6-21-26).

[64] In 1985 a leaflet was published by the Institute of Contextual Theology in Braamfontein, South Africa, written by members of the African Independent Churches, entitled 'African Independent Churches: Speaking for Ourselves'. This title is paradigmatic for the 'decolonising the (religious) mind programme' of the African Independent Churches. In the field of education, there are also instances of local appropriation of the term 'independent'. In the period 1929 – 1952, Kenya saw the phenomenon of the Kikuyu 'independent' schools. See Theodore Natsoulas 1998. Ngugi received his basic education in one of these Kikuyu independent schools (see Carol Sicherman 1995).

[65] AIC is taken as a blanket term comprising different types. A frequently made distinction is that between Ethiopian type African Independent Churches and Zionist AIC. The former dates back to the movement and ideology of 'ethiopianism' in the period from roughly 1890-1920 in which churches broke away from white missionaries, as a particular response to the colour bar. Edward Blyden stood in this tradition. The term 'ethiopianism' refers to Psalm 68: 31 which reads: 'Let Ethiopia hasten to stretch out her hands to God'. Ethiopia stood for the whole of Africa. The Zionist type of church strongly emphasised the working of the Holy Spirit.

colonial Christianity, for it was as highly topical a phenomenon in the period prior to decolonisation as it is at present.[66] Inus Daneel, an expert on African Independent Churches in Zimbabwe, wrote in his *Quest for belonging*:

> I argue that their quest for belonging is conditioned by much more than a reaction to missions, and that *to concentrate exclusively on the mistakes of missions implies a one-sided view which does not sufficiently acknowledge the creativity and originality to be found within these churches* [his italics]. (Daneel: 19)

According to Bourdillon, one of the main factors of the African Independent Churches that made them attractive for local populations, was their offering them an instrument 'of changing and adapting cognitively to a new environment' (Bourdillon 1990: 274). He also pointed out that the mission churches came from a literate tradition in which theology had been elaborated and a moral code had been fixed in writing. These did not fit well into the oral traditions of Africa. 'The Independent Churches have an approach to religion more in tune with oral cultures' (Bourdillon 1990:275). Daneel contrasted the 'sober rationalism' of the mission churches with the expression of 'uninhibited emotional joy in response to the African need for religious celebration' in the African Independent Churches (Daneel: 18).

Parratt added that the African Independent Churches have been a major factor in the field of religion in Africa. Their contribution to the development of a systematic African theology is, nevertheless, still hard to assess. According to Parratt, this is partly due to the very limited number of professionally trained theologians within the African Independent Churches (Parratt 1995: 6-9). The practice of systematic African theology is at present still in the hands of mainly Western-trained theologians in the mainline churches, despite the severe criticism they themselves expressed in their theological reflections on the dominance of the West in conceptualising the Christian religion in Africa. Unfortunately, many of these African theologians moved to positions in Europe and North America where their theologies 'can too easily become fascinating exotics for a Western elitist audience rather than a source of nourishment to Christian life in Africa'. (Parratt: 196).

[66] See e.g. the article of David Maxwell who researched the beginnings of the South African Pentecostal movement. He represented it as primarily a 'global phenomenon' but one that has a 'remarkable capacity to localize itself, taking on very distinct meanings in different local contexts' (Maxwell 1999: 244).

In *Speaking for Ourselves*, representatives of African Independent Churches commented as follows on their theology:

> It is a theology that is written in our hearts. We do not usually speak about it as a theology and we do not write about it in any systematic way; it is there in the way we believe and the way we worship and the way we live. (Anonymi 1985: 25)[67]

Bourdillon emphasised that African Independent Churches should not be stereotyped as merely diluted versions of Christianity: 'In many cases, the initiative came from people who were trying to make Christianity more real and more meaningful in their social contexts' (Bourdillon 1990: 276). In this way, African Independent Churches are typical examples of localisation processes in a globalising world.

It seems justified to define African Independent Churches as representing the Blyden-Hayford model (as defined for the universities by Ngugi) in the domain of religion, and to contrast them with the 'mainline churches' as the colonial institutions of the Horton-Asquith model. As such, African Independent Churches offer a role model for African universities. They might transform into *African Independent Universities*, capable of integrating and institutionalising hybrid forms of production and transfer of knowledge in order to restore the continuity between tradition and innovation, to use Ajayi's words. To stress this concept of hybridisation, African universities should be transformed into 'Transversities' able to accommodate different modalities of knowledge and different epistemologies.[68] In this respect, Obanya spoke of a combination of inherited knowledge and received knowledge.[69] Kudadjie & Osei sent out an 'invitation to a treasure hunt in

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[67] At the same time, they added that they should systematise their theology. However, they continue: 'This we have not found easy to do' (Anonymi 1985: 25).

[68] The term *Transversity* or *Connected University* was used by David K. Scott and Susan M. Awbrey in their article *Transforming Scholarship* (1993). De Transversity or Connected University is a continuation of the University and the 'Multiversity': 'the idea of a more connected University lies in creating new interactions and intersections in the multidimensional, but fragmented, spaces of the Multiversity. These spaces encompass the disciplines, different areas of knowledge, different multicultural groups, linkages to business, industry and society, and the multiple missions of teaching, research, and service, among others' (Scott & Awbrey 1993). Paul Wildman pleaded for the development of what he called 'polyphonic multiversities' that would integrate five types of knowledge: *techne*, *scientia*, *praxis*, *gnosis* en *relatio*. He argued that the first three types are prominently present in the Western 'monophonic universities', whereas *gnosis*, knowing yourself, and *relatio*, knowing through relating, are still virtually absent (Wildman 1998).

[69] Obanya also mentioned 'quartiary education'. With this term he referred to research mainly initiated by donors (Obanya 1998: *passim*)

the African desert and forest of knowledge' (Kudadjie & Osei 1998: 55). In some cases, hybridisation means a revaluation of endogenous elements, including local knowledge systems and local languages. If 'high-modernity' (this also applies to high-modernity circles in the periphery!) will drop its claim to exclusiveness of our Western concept of science, a better perspective could be offered for configurations of learning, and connected systems of knowledge production, in Africa which are heterogeneous but equal. In his article 'African Universities and the African tradition' the African historian Ajayi stated that the discontinuity caused by the colonial period, and the alienation from Africa's own history which resulted from it, should be healed in order to shed more light on the educational systems that had existed in Africa long before the colonial powers and their educational institutions arrived.

At the same time, however, African universities should not be 'reduced' to institutions in which only the study of 'indigenous knowledge' is institutionalised. Hountondji argued:

> The real issue today is how this so-called traditional knowledge can be actively, critically reappropriated by African societies in a way that does not entail traditionalism, passéism, or collective narcissism, but rather enables these societies to address the new challenges that face them. (Hountondji 1990: 7)

The emphasis on the importance of 'indigenous knowledge' can easily be used as a Western instrument with which to perpetuate existing power-relations between the different systems of knowledge. Some academics have convincingly argued that by using the dichotomy of scientific knowledge *versus* local (or indigenous) knowledge, one is still playing the dichotomy card of the 'developed' *versus* 'underdeveloped'.[70] Scott explicitly denounced the use of the term indigenous knowledge, because it still bore the connotation of being static and 'traditional'. Thomas Heyd warned: 'If its integration within indigenous social contexts is not recognized, however, the present interest in indigenous knowledge may actually turn into a new cause of *alienation* for native peoples' (Heyd 1995: 4; my italics). The danger is precisely the extraction of indigenous knowledge, as 'raw material', from its social setting by Western researchers and 'development-managers'. Heyd continued: 'its [indigenous knowledge, HvR] decontextualisation may alienate indigenous people from their own cultural context, and may, ultimately, contribute to their loss of distinctive identity' (Heyd 1995: 4).

[70] See e.g. Pfeifer 1996, Heyd 1995, and Agrawal 1995.

Nevertheless, science, in its Western-hegemonic guise too, cannot be withheld from Third World countries simply because it is perceived as carrying a colonial stigma. Science affirms its critical function of unmasking false authorities, also in countries grounded in different cultural assumptions. Meera Nanda wrote:

> Modern science will remain "morally relevant" to non-Western societies, and also to Western societies, as long as it threatens the traditional legitimisation of ideas, as long as it helps people stand back from, critically reflect on, and lose their faith in the ways of their ancestors. (Nanda 1998)

With these words, Nanda closed an article in which she vehemently criticised the 'gift' of post-modern and post-colonial thinking, i.e. of 'ethnoscience, situated knowledge, anti-Northern Eurocentric, or postcolonial science – labels that derive their force from their parental rubric of social constructivist theories of science'. (Nanda 1998)

'The Empire thinks back'?

Notwithstanding Nanda's words, and returning again to the Cultural Compatibility doctrine, there is yet another element in this doctrine that is important, to wit that it manifests a growing disillusionment with regard to the rationalist, positivist, epistemological building construction of Western science. The Western hegemonic epistemological model of science has also provoked internal criticisms throughout its history.

The criticism coming from Africa, shows an intriguing analogy with the fundamental critique of the dominant Western, read masculine, model of practising science, as formulated in feminist epistemology. Several new directions in science have developed from that critique. What those new directions have in common is the idea that scientific knowledge is, in the end, the result of a complicated interplay of contextual variables, including gender, power, ethnicity, and culture etc. The constructivist character of knowledge and the production of knowledge process are strongly emphasised. An important element in this feminist critique, is the concept of 'situated knowledge' which emphasised the position of the participant, especially the marginal position in which women often find themselves. Feminist theorists like Donna Haraway and Sandra Harding, have in common that they aim to go beyond the concept constitutive in the development of Western science: the dichotomy of subject *versus* object.[71] Donna Haraway tries to

[71] See e.g. Baukje Prins' 1997 Ph.D.study.

escape this dilemma by introducing the concept of ‘situated knowledge’, and Sandra Harding defines the notion of ‘strong objectivity’ as a possible way out of the epistemological relativism dilemma. This ‘strong objectivity’ is connected to Harding’s concept of ‘Standpoint Epistemology’. According to Harding:

> Standpoint theories argue that if one wants to detect the values and interests that structure scientific institutions, practices, and conceptual schemes, it is useless to frame one’s research questions or to pursue them only within the priorities of these institutions, practices, and conceptual schemes. One must start from outside them to gain a causal, critical view of them. One important way to do so is *to start thought from marginal lives.* (Harding 1992: down-loaded text; my italics)

According to Harding ‘to start thought from marginal lives’ might well be applied to a critical examination of Western sciences from the standpoint of those marginal people whose traditions of knowledge were marginalised precisely by these Western sciences. In other words, and borrowing the title of the well-known publication on postcolonialism and literature, **The empire thinks back**.[72]

This feminist epistemology shows a tendency towards a holistic approach to the world. Women sometimes point explicitly to the connection between feminist epistemology and a conservationist ecology.[73] On the basis of this holistic approach, Sandra Harding suggested in her article *The Curious Coincidence of Feminine and African Moralities*, a possible analogy between feminist epistemology and an African worldview grounding an African epistemology. In this article, Harding wanted ‘to explore some of the implications of the curious coincidence of the gender dichotomies with dichotomies claimed responsible for other forms of domination’ (Harding 1998: 361). Harding noted: ‘It is startling to be led to the inference that Africans hold what in the West is characterized as a feminine world view, and that, correlatively, women in the West hold what Africans characterize as an African world view’ (Harding 1998: 362). She derived this ‘African world view’ from a publication by the Black American economist, Vernon Dixon.[74] The nucleus of his perception of the ‘African world view’ was the absence of a gap between self and the world around him or her, as opposed to the Western separation between the self and nature by which both Nature and ‘the Other’ outside ‘self’ are ‘objectified’. According to Dixon, as quoted by Harding,

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[72] Cf. Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 1989.

[73] One also finds this holistic thinking in the New Age-movement, which criticised Western science-business because it is deemed to lead to alienation.

[74] Vernon Dixon 1976.

‘the African world view is grounded in a conception of the self as intrinsically connected with, a part of, both the community and nature’ (Harding 1998: 364). At the same time, Harding (as we also saw in Hountondji’s concept of ‘extraversion’) pointed to the dichotomy between the European and American ‘conceptualizers’ and the ‘executors’, or labourers, coming from Africa (also through the slave trade). ‘Thus [according to Harding] the African vs. the European world views are simultaneously ideological constructs of the imperialists, and also true reflections of the dichotomized social experience imperialism went on to create’ (Harding: 1998: 368). In other words, these world views are both constructs and products at the same time. Harding therefore pleaded for ‘cultural difference without the cultural domination endemic to so much of the history of gender and race’ (Harding 1998: 370). This could equally well apply to the fields of science and epistemology, in which new and different forms of knowledge can be pursued and institutionalised.

Post scriptum

The transformation of universities in Africa in the direction outlined above, will of necessity have far-reaching consequences for the practice of donor organisations in their support of these universities. These donors will have to desist from their present practice of interventionist strategies by which they implicitly impose a Western epistemological discourse under the guise of 'development'.

They should, instead, favour long term programmes that allow their African partners the necessary leeway and are not restricted to tightly defined co-operation projects with Western universities which sometimes negate their complex environments and force them, perhaps unwittingly, into the strait-jacket of their own dominant Western epistemologies. More than ever, African institutions will need room to take their own initiatives. Perhaps a certain degree of disengagement, like the one for which the Dependencia doctrine pleaded at an earlier time, may be necessary in order to stimulate an endogenous development (the African Independent Churches also received little external support in their development).

At the same time, co-operation with Western institutions should be evaluated in terms of the effect it has on those Western institutions themselves. 'Decolonising the mind' needs to result in a programme from which the '(neo-) colonisers' themselves will also benefit. Mazrui mentioned three strategies to counter African dependency, including intellectual dependency. The first one was the strategy of the 'domestication of modernity', meaning that it makes no sense to shut modernity out and fall back on a conservative traditionalism. Africa needs to find its own way of appropriating modernity. The second one was the 'diversification of its cultural content'. Diversification of the influx of cultural influences could result in a more balanced import from the Western hemisphere. In this respect, Mazrui pleaded for more input from Asia and especially the Arab countries.

The third strategy, which was of vital importance according to Mazrui, was what he called: reversing the flow of influence back into Western civilisation itself (Mazrui 1978: 314). He advocated a process of counter-penetration. Here he referred to the Black Americans as a potential target.[75] Abiola Irele, a renowned

[75] Ironically, Mazrui, working at the University of Binghampton, New York, is presently embroiled in a sharp debate with the Professor of Literature at Harvard University, Henry Louis Gates, a figurehead of black intelligentsia in de U.S. Gates recently made a film about his trip to Africa, called 'Wonders of Africa'. The film provoked severe criticism from Mazrui who reproached Gates with having travelled in Africa as a 'black' white man. Interestingly, Ali Mazrui talked about 'Black Orientalism'. This polemic, in turn, led the writer Wole Soyinka to criticise Mazrui sharply (see the compilation published in *West Africa Review* 2000).

African scholar who has been working in the States for many years, also suggested that the creation of ‘a kind of academic fifth column’ might have positive results for both parties involved (Irele 1991: 64). If one applies this idea of a counter-penetration to the European setting, it would mean that whose from foreign descent in the university community, will be able to exert more influence at every level in the universities in Europe. This may, in turn, affect the way universities structure their education and research and the way they run their institutions. European universities have apparently failed to integrate other epistemologies and modes of thought, despite some cross-cultural study-programmes (not to mention the fact that the gender ratio is also still out of balance at many European universities).

Double-edged academia

Huff showed that the institutionalisation of universities in the West originated from what he called ‘neutral zones’, in which these institutions were able to develop without continuous interventions from civil or religious authorities. In many cases, the development of universities in Africa showed an inverted image of what neutral zones are meant to be, confronted as they have been by the constant threat of interventions by civil and sometimes military governments engaged in the brutal business of muzzling their critics.

But as Okot p’Bitek had testified, the very notion of freedom of critical thinking on the part of individuals, and of free individual expression, is producing critical attitudes towards military, cultural, religious and intellectual dominance. Writers and academics, such as Okot p’Bitek and Ngugi, substantiated the intriguing paradox in the discourse of African academics, dominated by the West. In many cases, they articulated their fundamental critique of Western intellectual domination, couched in the Western conceptual framework that they internalised during their intellectual formation in the West, and directed it at a Western audience. If there were some kind of ‘conspiracy’ on the part of the West to dominate the global field of ‘Academia’, then it too generated its own critics.

‘The Pumpkin in the old homestead, must not be uprooted!’[76]

The processes of globalisation, also in the field of higher education, contain potentially grave dangers for the future of African universities (and probably not only for African universities). This development finds its culminating point in the present market-approach in which knowledge is conceptualised as a

[76] Okot p’Bitek 1984: 41.

‘commodity’ negotiable in a privatising and globalising market. This ‘commoditisation’ of knowledge and higher education is increasingly translated in a local supply of higher education through a system of ‘overseas validated courses’. In particular, some U.K. and Australian universities operate aggressively in the international knowledge-market and see this market as a potential source of income to compensate for national declining budgets. Efforts of African universities to ground more firmly in local traditions as suggested by some of the African academics, headed by Okot p’Bitek, will possibly be overtaken rapidly by the import of new Western satellite-campuses in Africa and will lead to further marginalisation of an uprooted local system of higher education.[77]

[77] See e.g. Bennell & Pearce 1998.

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And the Questions […] They flow endlessly

Some concluding observations

I would like now to make some concluding observations. I have firstly analysed the constituents of the quest of 'the West' for the *unbeliever* and the *ignoramus* in Africa, and examined the inherent power of defining, from different perspectives. For this purpose I collected four articles for this thesis, each of them drawing their own conclusions. I confess to my readers that it was never my intention to offer a clear-cut *definition of the problem* of this study. Instead, what connects the articles is that my definition of the problem of this thesis is *the problem of definition*, how the power of defining actually works. I wanted to take the reader on my own exploratory expedition, during which I sometimes vacillated between different tracks, and during which I was sometimes confused by the paradoxes I came across. This expedition was not meant to find definitive answers but rather to raise valid and relevant questions. The articles are a reproduction of parts of this journey.

During the journey, one of the questions related specifically to the concept 'African Traditional Religion' (in the singular). Would it not be feasible to conceptualise 'African Traditional Religion' as a discourse, 'a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority' (Said), originating from Western missionaries? This would offer a better understanding as to why renowned African theologians also followed a Western theological and epistemological track in their thinking; thereby confirming the working of the power of definition.

I 'accompanied' the missionary Edwin W. Smith when he left Britain at the beginning of this century for Africa, more in particular for the land of the Mashukulumbwe, the unknown and the ignoramus, the heathen and the unbeliever. Smith began his missionary work as a stranger amazed, and sometimes horrified, by what he saw. Gradually, however, he developed sympathy for the unbeliever who soon even turned out to be a believer too, be it one still in the 'kindergarten' phase of religion, thus demonstrating that, in the end, there was true interaction between the observer and the observed. Earlier categories and boundaries blurred, and Smith was, therefore, able to bring the unbeliever within his own definition of religion and include even these African savages into God's plan of Salvation for mankind. From his own perspective, Smith was able to define the religious system of 'the Other' as a preparatory system for the ultimate 'fulfilment', the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Smith laid the foundations for an 'African Traditional Religion' discourse, which, in retrospect, has turned out to have had a

lasting impact on later generations of African scholars and theologians who followed the paths established by the defining power exercised by missionaries, such as Smith himself, and by scholars of religions like Geoffrey Parrinder.

I also 'followed' Smith as he tried to 'measure' this savage human being before him. He collected raw material in the periphery for the new academic discipline of Cultural Anthropology, then developing in the metropoles. But Smith was also part of a colonial enterprise by which 'the Other' was brought under the hegemony of the colonial powers, secular, epistemological, and religious, and 'stored in the colonial library'. And this hegemony originated from the process of knowing 'the Other', indeed Smith called his project *Knowing-the-African*.

During this same journey, I also encountered the intriguing person of Okot p'Bitek. I read his beautiful poems *Song of Lawino* and *Song of Ochol*, as also his vehement attack on the Western power of defining in his *African Religions in Western Scholarship*, his scholarly *The Religion of the Central Luo*, as well as his nationalist *Africa's Cultural Revolution* and *Artist, the Ruler*. Okot embodied the paradox of an 'educated' modernist who put a high value on the local traditions of his community. He reproached the Western missionaries for being 'slaves of their definition', thereby distorting the religious systems in Africa, moulding them after their own definition, and finally representing the local Jok as the universal God. Okot presented the African woman Lawino as his interrogator of the missionary power of definition, a definition which had moulded her husband Ochol's identity, and had taught him to despise his local traditions.

I wanted to know whether Okot p'Bitek might bear the marks of a double consciousness; for Okot p'Bitek was both a Ugandan poet, dancer and storyteller combined, as well as an academic, who had been trained as a British social anthropologist by Evans-Pritchard who had conceptualised the *Religion of the Nuer* in terms of their spirits being refractions of his own European God. I showed that the Western theological discussion on the (Western) God's death, after the Second World War, had prompted Okot's critique of the Western moulding of African religions. Okot was even prepared to be an *a*-theist with the *a*-theists, like John Robinson in his *Honest to God*, in Africa where religions with their spiritual worlds were a dominant feature.

The mirror of this double consciousness is the double-edged alienation that Okot depicted so vividly when he talked about African academics who had been nurtured in the Western academic tradition. It made Ochol lament: 'Mother, Mother, Why, Why was I born Black?' (Okot p'Bitek 1984: 126) The reverse of the power of defining is the condition of being subjected to definition, i.e. of being defined. This gloomy picture drawn by Okot, combined with my long experience

in 'university development co-operation', made me change my journey and cross over to the area of 'Academia in Africa'.

The second part of my study reflects, therefore, my journey to the *ignoramus*, I wanted to explore whether the mechanism I had found in the field of religion, the power of definition at work, was also operating in the 'academia' domain. I wanted to find out whether the 'Academia in Africa' project, as conceptualised by Western donors, did not perhaps have a missing link that might explain, in part at least, some of the problems that universities in Africa are currently facing. Again, I am not able to offer definitive answers. Although I admit that more in-depth case studies are necessary, I hope nevertheless to have offered enough material to induce the reader to conclude that this power of defining is indeed at work, in a similar vein, in this area too.

This part of the study bears the marks of the writer's paradoxes. I am still convinced that the ability to think and argue critically and systematically, i.e. *ratio*, is a (secular) blessing for modern people. It should be a 'public good', as we tend to say these days. It enables, and empowers, people to locate themselves better, and thereby define their own positions and identities. It enhances their 'bargaining' power of definition. But, at the same time, I have came to see development co-operation, also in the field of academia, more and more in terms of a secular mission bringing the 'gospel' of the 'developed' to the 'underdeveloped', thereby severely downplaying the importance of the locality of the 'underdeveloped'.

The working of similar mechanisms in defining the *unbeliever* and the *ignoramus* does not necessarily produce the same result. The domains of religion and academia in Africa are subject to complex processes of external interventions and local processing and as a result have developed into different shapes. In this part of the thesis, I looked back again from academia to the domain of religion in Africa in which 'locality' appeared to be especially strong. African people have developed, within their numerous African Independent Churches, their own systems of beliefs and their own institutions of religion which were partly grounded in Africa's soil and partly fostered in reaction, and in opposition to, the Western intrusion of 'universal' religion. In this respect, the domain of religion could serve as a model.

The notion of 'development' is crucial. It says that people can be located in a uni-linear perspective, reaching from a past (mostly 'coloured' in negative terms, like 'backward', 'primitive' or 'traditional') to a future (which is supposed to be a 'bright' one). Remember what Edwin W. Smith did: he positioned the Mashukulumbwe and through them, African peoples in general, in terms of their religious beliefs, in the 'kindergarten', while 'we' remained in the 'higher class'.

On the other hand, Smith was convinced that we are all 'pupils in 'God's great school', that we are all part of this linear development. It means that the point of reference is the position of the Western 'Self'.

This reference point corresponds with the 'power of defining', and it is an essential element of the modern Western journey. We divide, we separate, we exclude, we develop dichotomies between 'us' *versus* nature, 'here and now' *versus* 'there and then'; our (true) religion *versus* the (pagan) beliefs of other people; our true (universal) knowledge *versus* (local) indigenous systems, our ratio *versus* their emotion.[1] The traits of this Western thinking are at work in the domains of the Christian Gospel as well as in its secular theology called science. Our 'Gospel' and its secular counterpart, are inclined to categorise and construct dichotomies.

But what is so idiosyncratic about this Western thinking, is that we bestow upon the-other-behind-us the potential to catch up, and we are even willing to assist him in this process. The Western journey of 'high modernity', therefore, is familiar with all kinds of 'utopian social engineering projects'. We have developed a very sophisticated set of guidelines for systematising these 'projects'. In the daily practice of development co-operation, we call them 'Logical framework', 'Zielorientierte Projektplanung' (Objectives-Oriented Project Planning), and 'Rapid rural appraisal' etc., and their purpose is to make our environment systematically 'legible'.[2] The development discourse creates:

> a documentary reality, composed of texts, reports, guidelines, memoranda, and the like which serve as a means of representing, preserving, and controlling a given reality, in this case underdevelopment. (Gow 1996: 5)

We constantly tend, however, to grossly simplify this environment. We relegate 'locality' solely to the realm of *Praeparatio*, to what is systematically planned to be brought about. But 'locality' develops its own dynamics. In a way, *the empire 'believes back' and 'thinks back'*.

[1] Fabian talked about a 'Typological Time'. He said: 'instead of being a measure of movement it may appear as a quality of states; a quality, however, that is unequally distributed among human populations of this world' (Fabian 1983:23).
[2] See e.g. Schmidt 1998.

And Lawino ended up asking questions:

And the questions

Are numerous like grass,

If you begin to ask them

They flow endlessly

Like the Nile waters,

They burn endlessly

Like the red fire

At the altar!

(Okot p'Bitek 1984: 90)

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